

FRAMING DIFFERENCE AND LEADERSHIP: AN ANALYSIS OF THE FRAMING  
PROCESSES OF EMERGING AND PRACTICING LEADERS

A Dissertation

by

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## ABSTRACT

Individuals who identify with a social minority group, particularly African American, tend to face problematic social conditions wherein difference becomes a salient factor by which they must make sense of, negotiate, and manage as they fulfill the role of “leader.” Researchers and practitioners have investigated and addressed this issue for a number of decades. Much of this research continues to classify the findings in overly simplistic terms (e.g., good/bad, positive/negative, evil/angelic).

This dissertation engages such research by focusing on the how minority leaders at varying stages of their careers engage difference and leadership. Overall, this dissertation seeks to address the specific framing devices emerging and practicing leaders deploy to make sense of issues at the intersection of difference and leadership. To this aim, more than 40 interviews were conducted to better understand the day-to-day, ongoing negotiations of African Americans who are actively seeking (emerging) or filling (practicing) leadership roles.

The analysis highlights eight framing devices enacted by practicing leaders and seven framing devices enacted by emerging leaders as they make sense of and strategically maneuver issues of difference and leadership. Several significant findings emerge that highlight the following points: the participants in this study enact (some) similar devices for similar purposes. Both emerging and practicing leaders enact frames to negotiate the stages within which they are experiencing organizational socialization. Continued research is necessary to unpack the complexities of difference and leadership.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to every single leader who challenges the status quo as a warrior or an ally.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Talk about leadership permeates conversations in any number of social contexts. Whether talk centers on Presidential rhetoric (Wood, 2007) or how unethical CEO's ruin once lucrative corporations (Seeger & Ulmer, 2003), leadership continues to garner a great deal of attention in popular news outlets. Moreover, scholars continue to interrogate a wide variety of leadership issues such as the emergence of leaders in times of public crisis (Fairhurst & Cooren, 2009), the frames media sources employ when the indiscretions of political figures become public (Kramer & Olson, 2002; Kioussis, 2003), and how minority leaders maneuver educational and corporate hierarchies (Allen, 1996; Parker, 1996, 2001, 2005). Leadership is an important topic to the lay public, practitioners, and academic scholars.

Communication leadership researchers work from the basic premise that leadership is about "a co-constructed reality" that emerges in and through "the processes and outcomes of interaction(s) between and among social actors" rather than the essence of certain types of people (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010, p. 175). Leadership becomes negotiated in the communicative back and forth between leaders and followers. As a result, communication researchers draw on conceptual, methodological, and analytic tools that give priority to utterances, texts, and silences to illuminate how leadership becomes negotiated among individuals within communication. Fairhurst and Grant (2010) characterize a communication approach to leadership as "sociohistorically interactional" research that focuses on "the macro influences of society, history, culture,



and tradition demonstrably operate within the micro of specific interactions among leadership actors” (p. 181).

Given the social nature of leadership processes, communication scholars interrogate the role interaction plays when leaders manage their leadership position in conjunction with a variety of societal, cultural, and social issues. For purposes of this dissertation, I argue that a communication perspective with its focus on the co-construction of social reality lends itself to a better understanding of how issues of difference, as marked by social categories such as race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, play out in leadership contexts. Unfortunately, the tendency in much of the leadership research is to concentrate on the experiences of White leaders as opposed to the issues minority leaders face (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Parker, 2005). For over a decade, critical scholars have called for increased focus on the experiences and practices of leaders of non-dominant social categories (Nkomo, 1992; Parker & Ogilvie, 1996). With the rising number of non-White, male and female leaders atop corporate, educational, and political hierarchies, it is imperative that we strive to investigate the unique experiences of these individuals so that we can develop more inclusive leadership models.

Scholars who have taken this call seriously have done an excellent job in identifying and studying the experiences of practicing leaders of non-dominant social categories. A number of studies have focused on the experiences of African-American men and women (Bass, 2009; Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Parker, 2005). For instance, in her seminal book *Race, Gender, and Leadership*, Patricia Parker (2005) draws on the life

histories of 15 African American women to challenge seemingly race- and gender-neutral leadership models. She argues that “new sources of leadership knowledge” are vital to the evolution of leadership, as a concept and as practice (p. xiii). This type of work offers a reflexive look at how non-White, non-male leaders make sense of and negotiate their social differences as they climbed organizational hierarchies.

In related fields such as education (see Bonner, et al., 2008; McKay, 2008; St. John, et al., 2009), psychology (see Pratch & Jacobwitz, 1996; Hopkins, et al., 2008; Lyness & Thompson, 2000), and leadership studies (see Richardson & Loubier, 2008; Ospina & Su, 2009; Airini, et al., 2010), scholars have taken seriously the unique social conditions that emerge when difference and leadership intersect. Work within these various disciplines connects well with leadership studies that fall into Fairhurst and Grant’s (2010) “sociohistorically interactional” category because they hone in on how “society, history, culture, and tradition” converge in the interpersonal interactions of potential leaders (p. 181).” “Potential leaders” refers to individuals seeking management and/or leadership organizational roles in the future. In the literature that focuses on potential leadership, one is more likely to find specific recommendations that training program designers must consider as they prepare high-school or college-aged leader hopefuls (see Bonner, et al., 2008; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Teasley, Tyson, & House, 2007). Unfortunately, the tendency in such studies is to treat race and leadership as fixed, rather than negotiated.

While many organizational scholars have overlooked the experiences of non-dominant leaders, the growing body of work in this area offers a useful approach for

recognizing the opportunity language and discourse present for changing the nature of how difference and leadership connect at the micro-level. The current project explores how individuals frame difference and leadership and how particular framing strategies open up and close off particular meaning making processes and ways of communicating. The aim of this dissertation is to serve as an important step in bridging the gap between discursive approaches and leadership studies that focus on issues of social difference by “positioning...cultural experience into the center of the study of organization leadership” (Parker, 2005, p. 93).

Again, this dissertation focuses on the experiences and insights of practicing and emerging leaders of non-dominant social identity positions as they negotiate and anticipate moments in which social differences become salient. Moreover, this study investigates and highlights reoccurring frames that leaders use to negotiate such moments. Before delving into such experiences, I bring together and unpack literature that focuses on conceptual and theoretical foundation of this dissertation. First, I draw on literature that explains the overlap, but more importantly emphasizes the differences between leadership psychology and discursive leadership. It is important to focus on the role communication takes on within each respective approach. The next section outlines research that focuses on how leadership and difference have connected in leaders’ experiences. Building on this research, the subsequent section connects the previous sections by bridging discursive leadership, framing, and difference. This section highlights a tendency to frame leadership and difference in two mutually exclusive

categories: (1) difference and leadership as a challenge, and (2) difference and leadership as a resource. I begin by outlining a discursive approach to leadership.

### **Literature Review**

This section distinguishes between leadership psychology and a discursive approach to leadership. The assumptions informing each leadership approach are first presented. The distinctions between each perspective are then illustrated by comparing psychological and discursive approaches to the study of charismatic and transformational leadership.

#### *Leadership Psychology*

Leadership studies tend to focus on the individual given their strong commitment to a psychological perspective (Fairhurst, 2007). The driving goal of research from a psychological perspective is to identify the personal cognitive abilities, innate traits, and behavioral styles that make certain individuals ideal candidates for high-ranking, decision-making positions. The aim of much of this research is to identify, quantify, and manipulate the “innate or heritable qualities of the individual” leader (Zaccaro, 2007, p. 7). Organizational scholars and practitioners often use these research findings to pinpoint aspiring leaders who should be able to guide the organization to success.

Leadership psychology has a rich history and continues to add important insight to our theoretical and practical understandings of leadership phenomena. Trait-based research is an exemplar of the way that leadership psychology theory and research within leadership studies operates. Three major assumptions are associated with leadership psychology: (1) the capacity to lead is located in the individual, (2) context

plays a minimal role in how leaders lead, and (3) communication is conceptualized as a transmissive phenomenon.

First, leadership psychology assumes the capacity to lead is located in the individual and treats leadership as an individualistic phenomenon. This assumption points to the notion that individuals with the right set of characteristics have the ability to control followers and contexts, articulate a new vision, and successfully transform organizational practices without being influenced by the very entities to which s/he controls. In this vein, leaders are considered to be all-powerful agents capable of guiding the group to success or failure. Such a perspective treats followers as somewhat “sheeplike (but highly motivated) followers who passively obey directions” (Graham, 1991, p. 116). This notion of leadership overlooks the role followers play in how leadership processes unfold (Fairhurst, 2007).

A second assumption of a psychological approach toward leadership is the role context plays in shaping leader-follower relationships (see Liden & Antonakis, 2009; Zaccaro, 2007). When context is inconsequential to leadership analyses, it is presumed that an effective leader in one historical, political, and organizational moment *will* be effective under different circumstances. This argument makes sense from an individualistic perspective because the presumption is that a leader who embodies a particular set of traits carries those traits into different contexts. In fact, this is a common assumption of trait-based approaches to leadership. However, this does not take into account changing cultural norms, expectations, and rules that change expectations and perceptions about leaders and followers.

Even psychological approaches to leadership which recognize the role that context plays in determining the appropriateness and effectiveness of leadership style such as contingency and situational leadership theory (Hoogh, Greer, & Hartog, 2015; Peus, Braun, & Frey, 2013; Zhang & Bartol, 2010), assumes that contexts are separate from leadership behaviors and that leadership behavior has a limited role in defining context. Context is treated as a separate variable that exists apart from the actions of leaders. For example, Hersey and Blanchard's (1969) life-cycle theory of leadership assumes that group maturity influences the appropriateness of particular leadership styles. However, as Grint (2005) observes, leadership behavior can influence the way that context is constructed and how participants make sense of the context they are located within.

A third important assumption in leadership psychology is that communication is a transmissive phenomenon. Psychologically-grounded approaches suggest that interaction "merely plays out the cognitive" (Fairhurst, 2007, p. 16). From this vantage point, communication is simply the vehicle by which leaders' natural abilities manifest. Interaction is treated less about knowledge producing and more about reporting the inner workings of the mind in order to control constituents. For trait-based approaches to leadership, personality traits, cognitive characteristics and the like drive what communicative behaviors should be performed. For situational leadership approaches, context features such as the nature of the task, the maturity of the work team, and power dimensions influence the appropriateness of particular leadership styles. In both

instances, the power of communication so shape traits and cognitive characteristics or the context is ignored.

### *Discursive Leadership*

In contrast to the previous assumptions, a discursive approach to leadership places the relationship between leaders and followers, contextual forces, and the social construction of knowledge and social reality at the center of inquiry. In terms of individual agency, the effectiveness of leaders is no longer measured by their ability to behave separately from other organizational entities. Researchers are thus less interested in the individual abilities or traits leaders' embody and enact to influence others. Instead, researchers working from a socially-constitutive orientation focus efforts on understanding the relationships leaders have with others in order to understand how leadership unfolds as a "social" give-and-take among interdependent organizational members (Fairhurst, 2009, p. 1608). The reconceptualization of leader-follower relationships suggests that followers play a significant role in leadership processes.

By treating leadership as a relational rather than individual accomplishment, the notion of agency and power is re-conceptualized. Discursive leadership (see Fairhurst, 2007, 2008) suggests that agency is not determined by individual characteristics such as access to resources. Rather, a discursive approach to leadership highlights reflexive agency, an ability to be aware of how one's messages and the messages of others influences the construction of identities, relationships, and culture. This suggests that reflexive agency and the ability to intervene into situation depends on an individuals' ability to attune to the unfolding system of communication that is unfolding, and to

recognize how their contribution and the contribution of others helps construct that system of communication.

Shifting from a view of leadership as an individual-centric to a systemic phenomenon carries with it implications for how the relationship between leadership and power is viewed. Power is no longer considered to be top-down, or solely at the prerogative of leaders. Instead, power is approached as a shared venture among leaders and followers. Leaders and followers mutually influence one another which opens up the possibility for resistance (Zoller & Fairhurst, 2007). This challenges managerial biases which position people in formal decision-making roles as having power and those who do not as being relatively powerless. Scholars often draw on Foucault (1972) by arguing that where there is power, there is the possibility for resistance by all parties within a system. Leaders and followers take up positions of power because both parties have the capacity to influence others whether that influence stems from formal forms of control or from the resistance of such control.

Discursive leadership scholars also have a different take on the role of that context plays in leadership processes. Rather than treating context as inconsequential to the prowess of effective leaders, social constructionist leadership scholars argue that leaders and followers shape and are shaped by their context (Grint, 2005). Grint's (2005) study of 9/11 is instructive in this regard. It is certainly true that history, societal norms, cultural expectations, and politics converge in different ways to create different conditions that constrain how leaders and followers interact and behave. This is the underlying premise of contingency (Fiedler, 1967) and situational approaches to



leadership. However, what Grint (2005) highlights is that the leaders in the Bush administration frame 9/11 and the events that followed as a “crisis” versus a “wicked problem” which legitimated Bush’s use of a command approach to leadership. A discursive approach to leadership thus focuses its analysis not only how context influences the way that leaders and followers communicate, but also how context is negotiated, shaped, and modified vis-à-vis the interaction of leaders and followers.

Finally, discursive leadership scholars place interaction at the center of leadership processes and argue that without communication, one cannot lead or be led. Furthermore, this perspective posits that communication constitutes leadership. Leadership gets constructed during social interaction. Put another way, leadership is achieved in and through communication, rather than in and through the cognitions of individuals. Leadership gets negotiated in the give-and-take interactions among leaders and followers (Fairhurst, 2007; Tourish & Pinnington, 2002). Put more simply, leadership is not achieved in the cognitions of certain individuals who were born with a specialized set of desirable leadership characteristics. Instead, leadership is constructed via discourse.

Before expounding on the discourse and the discursive approach to leadership, it is important to discuss two key notions of discourse in communication leadership studies. This move follows the lead of Fairhurst (2008) who draws on Alvesson and Kärreman (2000) and Foucault (1980) to distinguish discourse, or little-*d* discourse, and Discourse, or big-*D* Discourse. Little-*d* discourse involves our day-to-day interactions and how we use language in communicative events (Fairhurst, 2008, p. 3). Big-*D*

Discourse refers to the broader level, cultural, historical, and organizational constructions of how communication *should* unfold in particular context. It is imperative to note that discourse and Discourse influence one another and that a discursive approach to leadership focuses on the way leadership is enacted, performed, and constrained by discourse and Discourse.

Again, researchers who embrace discourse and/or Discourse when investigating leadership processes focus on the role of communication in such processes. Take for instance, Kelley and Bisel (2014) who interrogate the stories leaders and their followers use to negotiate and make sense of issues related to organizational roles, trust, and doubt. Clifton (2014) also focuses attention on the use of stories, as the media by which leadership negotiate a leader identity in the context of business meetings. A discursive approach to leadership does not ignore the role of materiality in its construction and performance. Cooren, Fairhurst, and Huët (2012) observe that materiality refers to that which does not seem obviously significant in a given set of communicative events, however materializes as something that plays a role in the events. They argue “there is no gap between materiality and discursivity” (*italics in the original*). In other words, physical realities (i.e., employees, work facilities, electronics, etc.) and communicative acts and behaviors are joined together in the workplace. Moreover, material objects and discursive activities simultaneously shape and are shaped by one another. Discursive leadership offers innumerable possibilities for addressing leadership processes as the above examples suggest.

## **Leadership Psychology and Discursive Leadership: A Comparison**

To further illustrate key differences between leadership psychology and discursive leadership, let us compare how leadership psychology and discursive leadership might approach the study of charismatic and transformational leadership. The emergence of transformative leadership can be traced back to the 1980s when organizations experienced a spike in the need to “develop a new vision, gather support and buy-in from stakeholders, [and] guide the organization through a transformative phase” (Pagan, 2008, p. 1). Leadership psychology scholars were at the forefront of transformational leadership and continue to work toward identifying specific traits and behaviors that can predict a leader's capacity for transforming organizations (see Judge & Bono, 2000; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2003; Shin & Zhou, 2003). Without overgeneralizing the aims and findings of this body of research, it is fair to argue that much of the transformational leadership research adopts a psychological perspective. For instance, in *Five-Factor Model of Personality and Transformational Leadership*, Timothy Judge and Joyce Bono (2000) work to determine if personality factors like “neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, and/[or] agreeableness” can be manipulated and in turn, predict a leader’s ability to be visionary and behave as an effective transformational leader (p. 751).

Judge and Bono’s (2000) study embraces a psychological perspective in a number of ways. First, the primary focus of inquiry is the leader. They conclude that leaders who are extroverted, agreeable, or open to experiences have a heightened capacity to influence followers (pp. 757 – 760). Their findings suggest that individuals

with a certain set of personality traits also have the ability to craft and transmit a clear vision that gets followers motivated to transform the organization for the better. This perspective treats change as linear and leaders – with the right set of personality characteristics – as change agents. Findings such as this provide scholars, practitioners, and organizations with an archetype for the type of leader organizations in transition should seek out.

In contrast, a discursive approach boasts a more process-oriented approach to investigate transformational leadership (see Amernic, et al., 2007; Tourish, et al., 2010; Tourish & Pinnington, 2002). From a discursive leadership perspective, communication is treated as that which constitutes the conditions with which leaders and followers influence one another as they collectively act into and as a response to their context in order to create change. Leadership is thus more complex and communication is the driving force of change, not the leader. For example, Amernic, Craig, and Tourish (2007) analyze organizational correspondence from Jack Welch, CEO of General Electric from 1981 – 2000, to GE employees and constituents. The authors interrogate, in part, the frames Welch uses in the correspondence. The following five metaphors become recurring staples of Welch’s approach to transformational leadership: (1) Welch as a pedagogue, or teacher, advisor, instructor; (2) Welch as a physician, “capable of diagnosing health and prescribing remedies (1849),” (3) Welch as an architect, or the person responsible for creating and sustaining structures within the organization; (4) Welch as the commander, or delegate, responsible for leading his troops; and finally, (5) Welch as a saint, capable of communicating the “real best interest” of his followers as he

directs them by drawing on “positive human values” (p, 1853). The study epitomizes a discursive approach to leadership because of the use of metaphor to re-negotiate and re-affirm the leader-follower relationship. The negotiations foreground discourse as the primary source of communication. Thus, meaning-making relies on communication for these metaphors to crystalize in the leader-follower dynamic at GE.

A discursive approach to transformational leadership, and leadership processes more broadly, expands conceptualizations of leadership because the leader is no longer treated as the lone change agent. Leaders are a part of a larger whole that includes followers, interaction, and context and communication represents the means by which all of those parts come together in harmony or tragedy. In keeping with the notion that leadership needs to be looked at systemically, including the interrelationships among leaders, followers, meaning making, communication, and context, a definition of leadership that takes seriously the role of discourse and leadership is required (for example, see Barge & Fairhurst, 2008; Fairhurst, 2007; Parker, 2005; Tourish & Pinnington, 2002). For purposes of this dissertation, I draw on Barge and Fairhurst’s (2008) definition of leadership as “a lived and experienced *social* activity in which persons-in-conversation, action, meaning and context are dynamically interrelated” (*emphasis in original*, p. 228). This definition moves the focus from individual cognitions, personality factors, and influence and into an understanding of leadership that involves a number of social factors that are linked together in and through communication. Furthermore, this definition allows us to interrogate the ways in which

participants make sense of, negotiate, and develop communication and behavioral strategies to manage day-to-day organizational tasks.

### *Leadership and Difference*

A growing number of critical organizational, management, and higher education scholars have explored the issues women and minorities face in leadership contexts (Allen, 2001; Bonner, et al., 2008; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Parker, 2001, 2005). Three themes from this line of research have emerged: (1) a focus on the stereotypical expectations minority leaders face, (2) the role of intersecting marginalized identities in leadership, and (3) attention to training programs designed to help minority leaders manage moments where their difference becomes salient.

#### **Stereotypical Expectations**

Stereotypical expectations represent some of the more widely cited issues minority leaders face during their careers (Harper, 2007; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Pratch & Jacobowitz; 1996). The research shows that certain cultural stereotypes about members of non-dominant social groups seem to remain consistent over time (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). For African Americans, the cultural narrative centers on caricatures of angry, “antagonistic” buffoons who are both “lacking in competence” (Eagly & Chin, 2010, p. 218) and intelligence. The possibility that colleagues might pick up on this stereotype then creates organizational conditions wherein a Black leader’s ability to lead others may be called into question. This can result in discriminatory practices whereby African Americans get promoted less frequently than emerging White leaders (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Eagly & Chin, 2007). In turn, this can result in underrepresentation,

which may be perceived as further proof that African American men and women cannot and should not hold leadership positions (Kanter, 1977; Ryan & Haslam, 2005; Bonner, et al., 2008). The activation of negative cultural stereotypes, discriminatory organizational processes, and numerical underrepresentations work together to create dynamics that sustain such dynamics.

We can also look to cultural narratives that stereotype women in ways that disqualify many from being considered as viable leaders. Historically, feminine characteristics such as gentleness and nurturance have run counter to masculine-centered expectations of rationality and aggression (Bronznick & Goldenhar, 2008; Eagly & Chin, 2010, Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). In terms of leadership styles, women are said to employ “more participative or democratic (communal) style and less autocratic or directive (agentic) style than men do” (Hopkins, et al., 2008, p. 349). Again, these presumptions undermine ideal leadership styles often associated with men. As a result, practicing women leaders may be regarded as effective leaders, however, their non-traditional leadership styles often further their marginalization in that the methods of leadership they employ, along with their female status, still represent something different, less than ideal, and less capable. Consequently, when women enact more masculine behaviors, they often face backlash. As Bronznick and Goldenhar (2008) note, women who are perceived as aggressive run the risk of being labeled a bitch. When notions of leadership and difference (femininity in this case) connect, the tensions created by incompatible values, identities, and communicative behaviors may activate and sustain broad cultural stereotypes. It is not necessarily a guarantee that women, or

other minority leaders for that matter, will be stereotyped; however, the possibility or threat that they may be stereotyped creates unique social conditions that members of underrepresented groups need to be aware.

More recent research on stereotyping has given attention to cultural stories and perceptions about Hispanics. This makes sense given the increased number of Hispanics in the U.S. and organizational contexts as the Hispanic population in the United States (United States Department of Labor, 2012). Eagly and Chinn (2010) argue that macro-storylines depict Hispanics as “uneducated and unambitious” (p. 218). When employees identify (or are perceived to identify) as Hispanic, they face the possibility that people of decision-making capacities may overlook them for leadership positions given their perceived ineptitude. The possibility of being stereotyped is a unique issue that minority leaders and must negotiate as they climb the corporate ladder.

### **Intersecting Identities**

A number of critical scholars agree that perceived and articulated stereotypes play a profound role in the experiences of minority leaders. Research has also addressed how intersecting minority statuses (i.e., race and gender; class and gender; race and class and gender) further constrain identity positions (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Parker, 2005; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Scholars point to intersectionality as an issue, which further complicates the relationship between notions of leadership and difference (Blake, 1999; Sanchez-Hucles & Sanchez, 2007; Pompper, 2011). For example, one significant finding of this body of literature proposes an intersection between race and gender



whereby White women take up a more privileged identity position than women of color.

As Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) put it:

White women can afford to focus on gender differences, whereas women of color must often focus on all of the areas of minority difference for them and how these sources of identity influence their struggle to achieve success and feel comfortable in majority-dominated organizations.” (p. 173)

While White women in leadership positions take up a marginalized position because of gender, they also take up a privileged position because of race. In contrast, women of color in leadership positions are further marginalized because of race *and* gender.

At the individual level, these converging identities may lead to the internalization of negative self-evaluations and an overall “fear [of] failure” (Pompper, 2011, p. 472).

This can lead potential leaders to turn down leadership roles because they begin to see themselves through the lens of cultural stereotypes. When individuals do so, they engage in “self-fulfilling prophecies” (Eagly & Chin, 2010, p. 218) under the logic of “People like me are not meant to be leaders. Why try?” For up-and-coming minority leaders who choose to take on available leadership roles, they report disguising, or hiding undesirable attributes that may sustain stereotypes about their particular social group (Stead, 2013).

This move to “mask” certain behaviors offers a sense of belonging or even “access privilege and status” (Pompper, 2011, p. 467). In other words, practicing leaders have found it beneficial to suppress certain aspects of their identity in exchange for organizational acceptance.

## **Difference Training**

Another significant body of leadership literature regarding difference focuses on training because training programs often serve as a hub for providing minority leaders with a venue for developing skills and strategies to manage the issues they may face at work. Some training programs seek to “develop a broad repertoire of characteristics, behaviors, and leadership styles” (Hopkins, et al., 2008, p. 353), such as a heightened sense of self-esteem (Teasley, Tyson, & House, 2009), personal relationship skills (McKay, 2008; Teasley, Tyson & House, 2009), counternarratives (McKay, 2008), a positive sense of self (McKay, 2008, p. 681), and collectivist leadership styles (McKay, 2008). Training messages typically advise up-and-coming minority leaders to connect with members of dominant social groups by participating in educational organizations dominated by Whites (Harper & Quaye, 2007). Emerging leaders then gain the opportunity to further develop the “cross-cultural communication” skills (Harper & Quaye, 2007) necessary for interacting in predominately White organizations.

Another goal of training programs has been to instill in leaders a sense of agency in managing their individual identity. Just as many practicing leaders suggest, future leaders are encouraged to enact a social identity that counters stereotypes (Harper & Quaye, 2007). Up-and-coming leaders are also encouraged to become comfortable with identifying and being identified as a racial/ethnic minority, but challenged to resist a token identity (Bonner, et al., 2008). In other words, aspiring leaders must be prepared to represent the only or one of the few minorities in their respective organizational

setting, however they should reject moments wherein they are expected to speak on behalf of their entire race or minority social group.

The literature connecting at leadership and difference has tended to focus on the role that stereotypical expectations, intersectional identities, and training play regarding the challenges that members of underrepresented groups, such as African Americans, face and how they manage these challenges. However, most studies do not focus on the way that members of underrepresented groups make sense of their experience, and how their sense making provides different resources for determining how to respond in situations where they feel that difference is a salient factor. There is a growing literature that examines the relationships among framing, meaning making, and action. In the next section, I examine the basic tenets of framing theory and then examine how difference has traditionally been articulated in the literature on difference.

### *Discursive Leadership, Framing, and Difference*

In 1974, Sociologist Erving Goffman introduced the concept of framing in his book, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. A number of scholars across disciplines have used framing theory as an analytic lens for exploring social phenomena. Social movement scholars have found framing theory particularly useful in investigating organizing and collective action (Snow & Benford, 1992; Benford, 1997; Benford & Snow, 2000). Communication researchers have also taken up framing as they worked to explain a number of social phenomena. In media studies, scholars use framing theory to investigate how framing connects with agenda-setting theory (Bryant & Miron, 2004), media effects (Scheufele, 1999), and culture (Van Gorp,

2007). Leadership communication scholars such as Gail Fairhurst (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996; Fairhurst, 2010) have applied framing to leadership processes.

### **Discursive Leadership and Framing**

Most approaches to framing adopt four key tenets. The first tenet is that framing provides a way for individuals to make sense of their social realities. Weick (1995) connects sense making processes and framing theory when he writes that “[t]he content of sense making is to be found in the frames and categories that summarize past experience, in the cues and labels that snare specifics of present experience, and in the ways these two settings of experience are connected” (p. 111). This suggests that in any particular situation, no single truth exists. Instead, individuals develop “particular versions of reality” in order to process their experiences (Fiss & Hirsch, 2005, p. 30). Framing does not necessarily offer leaders the capability to change material realities; however, framing does offer the “ability to shape the meaning of...the situation at hand” (Fairhurst, 2011, p. 3). Framing then provides individuals with the ability to create their own truths and in turn, multiple truths become possible.

The second tenet suggests that framing involves foregrounding particular details while simultaneously obscuring others. As Tankard (1995) so aptly puts it, “a frame placed around a picture-whether the picture is a painting, a photograph, or a real-world scene-cuts one particular ‘slice’ from that picture and excludes other possible slices” (p. 98). In other words, each frame that individuals use to make sense of their experiences foregrounds certain elements and obscures others. This ties back to the first tenet in that individuals can experience similar social issues and yet pick up on, or frame, different

aspects of their experience to create their truth(s) about the issue or experience.

Additionally, this tenet supports the point made by Dewulf, et al. (2004) that “[d]ifferent actors will understand the situation differently, prioritize different problems, include or exclude different aspects, and favour different kinds of solutions” (Dewulf, et al., 2004, p. 178). Although individuals may experience similar social issues – for instance power, resistance, or discrimination – different individuals may frame the same situation in different ways (Buzzanell & Turner, 2003).

A social constructionist approach pushes the second tenet one step further because it suggests that certain frames foreground and background certain ways of communicating, behaving, and relating in favor of others. Framing thus, not only allows individuals to rationalize their experience, it also provides direction for addressing their experiences (Snow, et al., 1986, p. 464). Put another way, how individuals frame their realities and observations directly connects to how they then communicate and behave before, during, and after certain situations. In sum, when individuals’ choose certain frames over another – consciously or subconsciously – they also open up certain ways of behaving in favor of others.

The third tenet is that framing is manifested in “word choice, metaphors, exemplars, descriptions, arguments and visual aids” (Van Gorp, 2007, p. p. 64). This tenet moves discussions of framing and leadership outside of cognition, because it posits that frames are negotiated and re-negotiation in social interactions. Thus, a communicative approach to framing theory focuses on language use as the unit of analysis. For scholars and practitioners then, it is imperative that the methodological and

analytic tools of choice focus in on interaction. For example, Dewulf et al. (2004) distinguish between psychological and interactive approaches to framing, highlight how language use creates frames for understanding one's experience from within the flow of interaction and suggests a number of tools for exploring interactive framing.

The fourth tenet is that framing is a communicative skill that leaders may develop (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996; Fairhurst, 2011). Leaders may learn how to identify opportunities where they can use various linguistic tools to achieve organizational goals. It is important to note that this is not an endorsement for manipulating followers for unethical or amoral ends – although a justified argument could be made that the dark side framing could result in such outcomes. Instead, this fourth tenet calls on leaders to develop their framing skills in order to create organizational conditions wherein leaders and followers can identify, articulate, and appreciate multiple realities.

### **Difference Frames**

When we look at difference-leadership research through the lens of framing theory, two frames emerge from the current literature. The first frame is in line with the implicit assumption pinpointed earlier that treats *difference-as-a-challenge*. Within this frame, one's social *difference* (i.e.; race, gender, class, and so on) gets framed as a barrier that leaders must develop certain skills to overcome. In contrast, a second frame can be identified in the literature which may be articulated as a "*difference-as-resource*" frame, which involves treating one's social difference as a cultural resource that can help minority leaders meet the challenges of complex, contemporary, and diverse organizations.

### *Difference-as-a-Challenge*

One way to understand how individuals – including leaders, researchers, and practitioners – frame issues is by looking at how they use language. When we look at the language in the current difference-leadership literature, a number of metaphors frame difference as a challenge. Possibly the most familiar metaphor to many is that of a “glass ceiling,” a theory introduced by Hymowitz and Schellhardt (1986) to describe the invisible divide preventing women from climbing organizational pecking orders. Ryan and Haslam (2005) build on this metaphor in their discussion of a “glass cliff” which occurs when women break through the glass ceiling only to find themselves in “precarious” and “problematic organizational circumstances” wherein failure is inevitable (p. 87). Subsequently, when women leaders’ innate incompetencies get revealed vis-à-vis their organizational failures, the logic that women do not have the capacity to lead gets reaffirmed (Kanter, 1977).

The difference-as-challenge frame also takes form in the proposed and reported strategies of practicing minority leaders. Some find it advantageous to hold back information that may be perceived as undesirable (Pompper, 2011, p. 476). For instance, women leaders may not share plans to start or expand their family. Women may also don material items or behave in ways associated with a more ideal *persona*. Leaders report wearing eyeglasses or less feminine attire (Pompper, 2011, p. 475) and being more assertive in interactions (Airini, et al., 2011, p. 53).

Practicing leaders also emphasize the importance of creating mentor-mentee relationships, particularly with senior leaders (Airini, et al., 2011, p. 52). They note how

crucial it is that women and minority leaders connect with others in leadership positions – others who may or may not identify with the same social categories – in order to learn invaluable information about how to succeed in their organizational setting. Whether the strategies stem from the messages presented at various development programs or from the experiences of practicing leaders, the *difference-as-challenge* frame foregrounds inequality, social barriers, and the material realities associated with one's skin color and/or gender.

#### *Difference-as-a-Resource*

The second dominant frame emerging from the literature is the *difference-as-a-resource* frame. Within this frame, difference gets framed as human capital that can be drawn on to help leaders better serve their respective organization. Difference is no longer viewed as a barrier that development programs must help leaders overcome. Instead, difference is associated with life experiences (e.g. interacting with members of dominant social status) that provide leaders of non-dominant social groups with skills (i.e., co-cultural communication) that will better suit them in organizational contexts.

Take for instance Cheung and Halpern (2010) who investigate how married or divorced women leaders describe managing work and life responsibilities. Cheung and Halpern (2010) found that a “mothering metaphor” emerges in participants’ recollections (p 188). In this case study, women did not view gender as a weakness. Instead, participants embraced the image of a nurturer who concerned herself with the well-being of others. Gender then became a resource that allowed participants’ to better serve and lead employees and this informed how leaders’ approached leadership as leaders



articulated the importance of empowering employees, advocating for open communicating, and “being considerate and respectful of their staffs” (p. 188).

Cheung and Halpern (2010) are among a growing numbers of scholars who support the argument that some women leaders find that gender helps them better serve and support followers. Take for instance, Eagly and Chinn (2010) who say that, “women adopt a positive managerial approach that trades on rewards rather than...reprimands” (p. 219). One can surmise the organizational conditions such an approach fosters. Followers are not necessarily exempt from making mistakes; however, they can make mistakes without the expectation of being demoralized. For followers, this may lead to a greater sense of empowerment to make decisions on their own, more freedom to be creative, or among a number of things.

According to difference-leadership literature, another way that leaders’ difference can become an organizational resource is during the procuring of the mentor-mentee relationships. Scholars specifically call on individuals in powerful, decision-making positions to implement programs focused on connecting new minority leaders with more seasoned leaders (Hopkins, et al., 2008). Hopkins and company (2008) specifically call on decision makers to create opportunities whereby up-and-coming leaders can “serve as *both* mentors and mentees” (p. 351) (*emphasis added*, Hopkins, et al., 2008). What Hopkins, et al. (2008), like a number of other scholars (Lyness & Thompson, 2000), practitioners, and leaders, seek are real “developmental job assignments strongly associated with career advancement, for example, higher risk, higher return, visible, diverse, external, and international responsibilities” (p. 359). The

mentor-mentee relationship may then create the opportunity for new minority leaders to share insights and experiences that will benefit how more tenured leaders of majority subject positions. The minority leader's differences thus become a resource for the mentee and the mentor.

Current difference-leadership literature has not taken up framing as a lens for exploring, critiquing, and attempting to change the nature of how Discourses of difference and leadership connect in the micro-discourses of African American leaders. However, this body of research connects quite nicely with the framing literature highlighted above. Framing is about getting at the cultural influences that leaders face as they serve as leaders. Framing also points us in the direction of broader Discourses that influence how leaders make sense of, respond to, and negotiate Discourses. To empirically connect these two literatures in new ways, we can look at the linguistic tools that are offered to aspiring leaders in development programs and those tools that practicing leaders have developed over time.

### *Research Questions*

For decades, scholars have called for more research that focuses on the experiences of minority workers and leaders (Allen, 2003; Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007; Nkomo, 1992; Parker, 2004). This dissertation answers that call by investigating the experiences and framing processes of African American men and women who are at various stages of their leadership careers.

While difference and leadership research engages leaders of underrepresented social groups, the way that communication constructs difference and leadership is often

overlooked. While discursive leadership does a very good job of focusing on various communicative processes central to leading, it has overlooked the experiences of members of underrepresented groups. This project seeks to address the critical gaps in difference-leadership and discursive leadership research by focusing on the communication framing processes of minority leaders. Before providing the three research questions that guided this dissertation, I briefly discuss the foundation each body of literature provides this project. I then identify gaps in the literature and explain how this project sought to connect issues of social difference, discursive leadership, and communication framing devices.

Difference and leadership research draws critical attention to the social conditions minority leaders negotiate in anticipation and in response to the issues social difference creates in American organizations (Chin, et al., 2008; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Rusch 2004). As a result, we have gained a greater sense of the social conditions African American leaders may face in organizational contexts such as stereotyping, raced and gendered expectations, and token dynamics (Eagly & Chin, 2010; McDonald, Toussaint, & Schweiger, 2004; Ridgeway, 2001). However, difference-leadership research has not specifically addressed how minority leaders – specifically African American leaders – use communication to navigate such conditions (see Parker 1996, 2001, 2004 as a notable exception). More specifically, the literature has not yet addressed the specific framing devices African American leaders use to enact, navigate, make sense of, and negotiate meaning. In sum, current difference-leadership work provides readers with a sense of how researchers and practitioners are framing minority leaders experiences, but

we do not have a sense of how African-American leaders themselves frame their experiences regarding difference in the organizational context. This line of argument informs the first research question.

RQ1: How do minority leaders frame the role of difference in their day-to-day organizational experiences?

RQ2 builds on the first research question by connecting frames with behavior, enactment, and power. As the framing literature suggests, the frames that individual deploy in situations shape how individuals prepare for, respond in, and reflect upon their interactions. It is important to investigate the relationship between frames and behavior because when leaders choose particular frames over others, they strategically or unknowingly choose particular ways of making meaning which influences their level of agency and subsequent behavior. We know relatively little about the way that minority leaders use frames influences their level of agency and subsequent behavior. RQ2 focuses on how particular frames not only influence leader's perceptions of agency, but also opens up and closes off certain ways of behaving and communicating.

RQ2: What is the relationship between framing and agency?

One aim of this dissertation is to address how members of minority social groups at various stages in their careers as leaders make sense of, manage, and negotiate their status as a minority and their work role as a leader. The research literature suggests that two different kinds of minority leaders tend to be studied: (1) practicing leaders who are currently members of organizations as evidenced by the literature on stereotypical expectations and intersectionality, and (2) emerging leaders as evidenced by the

literature on training. These distinctions are important because they sample leaders with differing levels of occupational, workplace, and organizational socialization, which may influence their perceptions of leadership and difference.

There is a larger literature in organizational studies regarding socialization. Socialization involves the various processes by which potential, current, and former employees gain a better understanding of the communicative, behavioral, and cultural expectations, or rules, within a particular organizational context (Kramer, 2010; Van Maanen, 1975; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Socialization processes are complicated and nuanced, and often overlap one another making the process of socialization complicated. As a result, organizational scholars have worked to develop models that help better research and analyze the complexities that emerge in workers' experiences.

One type of socialization model can be categorized as phase models, or models that focus on the unfolding of socialization processes over time (Kramer, 2010). Research that emphasizes the role of time in organizational socialization tends to approach socialization as consistently unfolding over the course of three phases: (1) anticipatory socialization, which involves messages and encounters that influence how potential employees make sense of careers, organizations, and industries before they enter into respective positions or contexts; (2) encounter, which occurs once employees have entered into an organization and now must gather information to adapt to the organizational culture (Miller & Jablin, 1991); and (3) metamorphosis, which involves the transformation from a "newbie" to a more seasoned member of the organization (see, Gallagher & Sias, 2009; Kramer, 1993).

The second type of socialization model focuses on the content of the messages, experiences, texts, and so on that employees (potential, new, and seasoned) encounter. The focus of this second type of socialization model is the gist or “what” is at the center of one’s socialization experience. This can include messages regarding gendered, racialized, organizational, and industry expectations for the employee and his/her role in the organization. People can encounter these messages as early as childhood (Levine & Hoffner, 2006). The focus of these models is on the content, function, and structure of socialization messages that people are exposed to as opposed to what socialization phase they are currently in.

There is a great deal of work on anticipatory socialization. In regards to work socialization, there are a number of factors that shape the messages future employees receive before they begin their careers. Anticipatory socialization can begin as early as childhood. As Myers, et al. (2011) points out, young girls and boys will receive messages about which career paths are “acceptable” given their gender. Historically, young girls are encouraged to take up careers that involve some degree of nurturing others (e.g., nursing, teaching, homemaker); while young boys are encouraged to go into the sciences and management. These messages can be communicated from a number of sources, including: immediate family, influential non-family members, media and educational outlets (Jablin, 2001). Regardless of the source(s), the anticipatory socialization phase begins early on and continues throughout the employee’s career as they continue to prepare for and anticipate new job responsibilities, titles, organizations, co-workers, and so on.

The messages workers experience during the anticipatory phase are going to differ from the messages they experience during the encounter phase. As Kramer (2010) notes, preparing for an industry or organization is different from preparing for a specific job, title, or role. Individuals who are interested in earning and filling a management or leadership position then place themselves, or are placed by others, on a different trajectory in terms of their career paths. Participating leaders then have experienced both the anticipatory and encounter phases. They have experience in adapting to and negotiating organizational norms. Such experiences set them apart from emerging leaders who are anticipating negotiating organizational norms.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I am interested in exploring the possible framing differences between people who are currently filling positions (practicing leaders) and those who are preparing for leadership positions (emerging leaders). The literature on socialization highlights that differences might exist because these two groups are in different stages of the general socialization process (phase model) and may receive different messages due to their being at different points in their career development (content model). For example, practicing leaders who have been in leadership positions for two decades likely grew up in a time that was not far removed from segregation. Moreover, given the contested conversations regarding race, diversity, and affirmative action within the workplace over the last 20 years, they may have received negative messages from their organizations regarding leadership and difference. As a result, practicing leaders might feel a lower sense of agency when it comes to leadership and difference. On the other hand, emerging leaders are possibly more

optimistic about their experience and negotiating issues where difference and leadership connect in the workplace. Most participants within this category have seen a bi-racial President of the United States and the training they have received may have emphasized what is possible in terms of leadership and difference. While it is possible that that emerging leaders received much different messages than their practicing leader counterparts and therefore have divergent perceptions of leadership and difference, this is an area that merits further empirical exploration. This leads to the third research question:

RQ3: What are the similarities and differences in the frames that practicing and emerging leaders use to engage leadership and difference?

This will add an important layer to this dissertation because it will give a better insight into the understandings, approaches, and expectations of these two groups—offering a more nuanced comparison of two distinct, yet related groups.

This project focuses on very specific moments in the leaders day-to-day experiences – moments wherein difference becomes a salient, foregrounding force that shapes the communicative moment for the leader. For the purposes of this research, these moments are important for three reasons. First, these moments are important to gain a better understanding of how leaders frame the moments. Second, these moments are important to gain a better understand of how leaders exercise (or do not) agency when they frame moments in particular ways. Finally, it is important to compare and contrast how emerging and practicing leaders engage frames and agency.



### *Summary*

The purpose of this chapter is to lay the foundation for this dissertation by highlighting research that focuses on issues of leadership, social difference, organizational socialization, and communication. Current literature identifies two reoccurring approaches to understanding difference in the context of leadership: (1) difference as a problem; or (2) difference as a resource. The major aim of this dissertation is to explore how a discursive approach to leadership can be used to better understand the relationship between leadership and difference based on the experiences of minority leaders. More specifically, it explores how emerging and practicing leaders frame their experience with difference and how these frames not only influence their perceptions of agency, but also what subsequent behaviors and action are prohibited, permitted, and obligated in different situations.

The following four chapters are organized as follows: Chapter II: Methods, Chapter III: Analysis – Practicing Leaders, Chapter IV: Analysis – Emerging Leaders, and Chapter IV: Findings and Conclusion. Below, I explain, broadly, the contents of each chapter.

In Chapter II, I explain my research positionality. This sets the tone for the detailed description of the methodological decisions made throughout the data collection process. Chapter II concludes with a comprehensive discussion about how Framing theory (Fairhurst, 2005; Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996) and Coordinated Management of Meaning theory (Pearce, 2005; Pearce and Cronen, 1980) serve as analytic tools for addressing my three research questions. In Chapter III, the thematic analysis of frames

described by practicing leaders is presented. Chapter III can be broken into two distinct sections. In the first section, the focus is on the frames enacted by practicing leaders which addresses RQ1. The second section of Chapter III focuses on unpacking the levels of meanings embedded within each of the frames and articulating how each frame is associated with different levels of agency, the focus of RQ2. Chapter IV follows the same organizational pattern established in Chapter III; however, the focus is on the experiences of emerging leaders. Again, the first section focuses on the frame emerging from the data, and the second section focuses on the levels of meanings embedded within each respective frame and how they contributed to perceptions of increased or decreased agency. In Chapter V, the final chapter in this dissertation, I offer a comparative look at the experiences of emerging and practicing leaders. The aim of Chapter V is to offer important insights into how the findings presented in this dissertation connect to, challenge, and extend theory and practice in the areas of organizational communication, leadership, and diversity.

## CHAPTER II

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The focus of the dissertation is to understand the ways that practicing and emerging leaders framed their experiences regarding difference and the influence that certain frames held regarding their level of agency. As a result, it was imperative to employ research methods that allowed for the collection of rich data that could tap into the experiences, negotiations, and sensemaking processes regarding participants' perceptions of leadership and difference. I chose to employ qualitative research methods because they offer researchers the tools to "preserve and analyze the situated form, content, and experience of social action, rather than subject it to mathematical or other formal transitions" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 18). This stands in stark contrast to quantitative research methods where the dominant goals of researchers tend to be replication, manipulation, and generalization.

Data were collected using qualitative methods with the aim of addressing my three research questions:

RQ1: How do leaders frame the role of difference in their day-to-day organizational experiences?

RQ2: What is the relationship between framing and agency?

RQ3: What are the similarities and differences in the frames that practicing and emerging leaders use to engage leadership and difference?

Data was generated to identify the framing devices participants deployed when engaging moments where difference was foregrounded in their workplace experience.

Specifically, I wanted to generate explanations, stories, and accounts to help unpack the various layers of meaning constituting each frame and explore how the pattern of meaning making increased, decreased, or neutralized people's sense of agency.

The aim of this chapter is to offer a detailed look into the various qualitative tools used to better understand the experiences of minority leaders. The organization of the chapter is as follows. First, I explain my researcher positionality by exploring my epistemological, ontological, and axiological commitments. Second, I describe the two participant samples: (1) the practicing-leader sample, and (2) the emerging-leader sample. Third, I then explain, how I analyzed the data to address the three research questions that guided this dissertation.

### **Research Positionality**

As a researcher, I strongly identify with a subjectivist epistemology. This runs counter to an objectivist position which approaches our social reality as a thing, or entity that can be measured and manipulated by identifying higher order truths via hard, cold, irrefutable facts that exist in our world. My stance is that our worlds are socially created and sustained in a fluid fashion, in and through our communication with others. Put this way, our worlds are not made up of irrefutable facts that existed before us, but are negotiated each time we communicate (Burrell & Morgan, 1979).

Ontologically, I approach social realities as phenomena that are constantly being constructed in and through communicative acts by social actors (Berger & Luckman, 1967). Given this ontological perspective about reality and the assumption that communication is complex, I approach data collection using tools that fall in line with

inductive approaches to generating data and analysis (e.g., Charmaz, 2008, Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As a researcher, it is imperative to collect data directly from the source(s) and thus, allow participants to tell their own stories and offer their own insights.

To be transparent, my experiences and identify as an African American women in a field where I am outnumbered, with regard to race, and race and gender, and race and gender and class, influence my axiological commitments, how my values influence my research choices. My approach to axiology influences the choices I make with regard to language use, research topic, methods, manuscript submissions, and much more. For example, this explains why I am interested in the experiences of minorities in similar conditions. Moreover, this explains why I am interested in speaking directly to participants, in a safe place, so that they can explain their perceptions. There is richness in speaking to those who rarely have a platform to sharing their experiences. Taken together, my subjectivist epistemology, social constructionist ontology, and value-laden axiology provides background as to why I made the methodological choices I explain in more detail below.

In addition to my emphasis on gathering deep, qualitative “rich” accounts (Lindlof, 1995; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Tracy, 2013), it is important to explain my position as a researcher who focuses on the experiences of minority leaders specifically in organizational contexts. My approach to better understanding organizational phenomenon is that of a critical scholar. I approach organizations as sites of power, domination, and resistance (Allen, 1996; Clair, 1996; Mumby, 2001), which involves communicative processes, such as: negotiation, domination, inequality, coercion,

emancipation, and a number of other processes. My position is that organizations tend to be sites of domination wherein members of minority social groups tend to face inequality at all organization levels – in similar and yet varying ways. As a critical scholar, it is my aim to add to the body of organizational communication research by highlighting the experiences of leaders who, historically, have been under- or misrepresented (see also Allen, 2000; Parker. 1996, 2003). More importantly, it is my aim to offer an additional platform for minority leaders to share their voices and experiences.

### **Data Collection**

Previous research has tended to interrogate the experiences of either practicing or emerging minority leaders (Parker, 1996; Parker & Ogilvie, 1996; Parker, 2005). However, few empirical studies directly compare and contrast the experiences of practicing and emerging minority leaders.

### *Sample*

Interview data was collected from practicing and emerging African American minority leaders regarding the way they framed the intersection between leadership and difference and its relative influence on their sense of agency and subsequent behavior. To qualify as a “practicing leader,” participants needed to occupy currently a management or leadership role in for-profit or non-profit organization. To qualify as an “emerging leader,” participants had to meet two inclusion criteria: (1) participants had to be enrolled as part- or full-time students at a college or university, and (2) participants had to display leadership qualities in a campus context (e.g., classroom, University-

recognized organization, on-campus job) as determined by the person who submitted the participant's name.

### **Practicing Leaders**

Practicing leaders were considered to be those individuals who filled a management or leadership role within their respective workplace at the time of the interview. As Lindlof and Taylor (2002) explain, “most sampling decisions in qualitative inquiry are not based on procedures of random probability,” instead, “(m)ost qualitative studies are guided by *purposeful sampling* (italics in original)” (p. 122). Therefore, participants were purposefully and deliberately chosen because they fit with the two criteria of this study; (1) they identified with a minority social group; and (2) they were in a management or leadership position.

Following IRB approval at Texas A&M University, I used my personal and professional networks to create a list of potential participants. This involved sending emails and speaking to colleagues face-to-face to solicit individuals who met the inclusion criteria. More than thirty potential participants were identified using this method and were subsequently contacted via email. Of those contacted, twenty individuals agreed to take part in face-to-face, audio-recorded interviews. Ten men and ten women participated in this dissertation project (n=20). Age, industries, length of time in leadership role, organizational type, size, and location varied. The sample mirrors similar qualitative studies that focus on minority leader populations (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Parker, 2005).

Face-to-face interviews were conducted and lasted between 30 and 75 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded. Participants were assigned pseudonyms for confidentiality purposes following each interview. Interviews, transcripts, and pseudonyms were kept in different protected locations. After the final interview, all audio files were sent to a third party for transcription. Approximately 211 pages of double-spaced, transcribed data were generated.

Additionally, any references to specific organizations, job titles, and so on were removed, again, to protect participant identities. Identifiable information was not included in this dissertation because of the potential token effect. One symptom of tokenism is heightened visibility (Kanter, 1977), which refers to the tendency of members of minority social statuses to stand out in organizations because they are outnumbered. The ratio of being outnumbered increases the higher one climbs the organizational hierarchy. Thus, if information such as organization or job title were included in this write-up, it may not be difficult to connect quotes back to participants although pseudonyms are being used. The possibility of connecting quotes back to specific participants could have jeopardized participants' willingness to take part in the process.

### **Emerging Leaders**

Participants were selected using a convenience sample. In the first-step of the recruitment process, an IRB-approved recruitment email was sent to my departmental and University colleagues requesting the names of students who identified as a minority and enacted leadership qualities on campus. In a number of cases, contacts asked for



more specific definitions of “minority” and/or “leadership.” In each case, it was explained to the contact that “minority” is to be considered based on the typical social categories exercised in the United States (e.g., race, gender, class, physical ability). As it relates to defining “leadership,” I allowed each contact to define leadership in their terms and choose students according to their perceptions of leadership qualities. Some chose potential participants based on their affiliations with on-campus programs (e.g., Resident Life, student government, fraternities, sororities, and so on). Other colleagues chose participants based on perceived leadership behaviors portrayed in class (e.g., speaking up, taking the lead in group projects, etc.).

After a list was compiled, all potential participants were contacted via email using an IRB-approved prompt. More than fifty students were contacted, with twenty-four students agreeing to participate. Two potential participants were unable to take part in the study due to scheduling conflicts. Two additional participants were interviewed, but subsequently not included because they did not identify as African-American. In total, twenty emerging leaders participated in this phase of data collection (n=20). Sixteen participants identified as female. Six participants identified as male. For the same purposes described in the last section, any additional identifiable markers were removed to protect participants’ identities.

Similar to the process of interviewing practicing leaders, interviews with emerging leaders were conducted face-to-face and audio recorded. All participants were enrolled full-time at the time of the interviews. All students were at least in their second year of college. Unlike the first phase, all participant interviews were conducted in the

personal office of the primary investigator. Interviews lasted between 20 minutes – 1 hour and 15 minutes.

After all interviews were completed, the interviews were fully transcribed by a third party. Approximately 115 pages of double-spaced transcripts were produced. During the transcription process, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant. Again, to protect participant identities, specific organizational affiliations and any other identifying information (except for gender) were removed.

### *Interview Protocol*

Two separate interview guides were created—one for practicing leaders and one for emerging leaders. The reason two separate interview guides were created is that the two different samples of leaders were at a different places, or stages in their careers making particular questions more or less relevant and appropriate for each sample. Practicing leaders have encountered and experienced the organizational setting as a leader, while emerging leaders are anticipating organizational encounters and experiences. To this point, it was important to develop an interview protocol that posed question and included language that was consistent with these different stages. For example, for practicing leaders, the language within the protocol was often in past tense. However, for emerging leaders, the language was designed to address the future, or what is possible.

### **Practicing Leaders**

Appendix A contains the interview guide for the practicing leaders. It was important to craft an interview protocol that addressed specific moments in the

practicing leader's careers where social difference and leadership intersect. I needed to create an interview guide that would allow me to elicit such moments in order to identify the frames participants deployed to make sense of their experience, the possibilities such frames opened up and closed off, and how leaders came to use particular frames (e.g., training programs, previous experience, etc.).

It is important to note that the protocol does not begin by addressing such moments. Instead, the protocol begins by asking questions that get at the participant's perceptions about their organizational identity. For example, I asked questions like: "How do you describe yourself as a leader in this organization?" and "What are the experiences along the way that inform your approach to leadership?" The goal with such questions was to build rapport with participants.

As the conversation in the interview evolved, the interview questions began to address the specific moments where difference were perceived to be a salient issue to participants as they sought to fulfill their duties as a leader. Put another way, we spoke about moments in the workplace when being a minority seemed to be an issue. One line of questioning that highlights this point reads as follows:

1. When do you notice your race/gender influencing how people perceive you as a leader?
2. What made this stick out for you?
3. How did you respond?
4. What made you respond in that way?
5. What did you learn from this moment?

6. How has your approach to dealing with such moments changed or remained the same over the span of your career?

In some instances, I would ask probing questions that do not appear in Appendix A in order to maintain the flow of conversation. For instance, there were several instances where I asked participants to “Can you tell me more?” or “Can you be more specific?” Such probing questions were imperative to ensure that the interviews elicited detailed accounts of their experience.

It was also important to do my best to understand how they made sense of their stories. In order to do so, I consistently paraphrased portions of participant’s stories and asked questions, such as: “Is that what you mean?” “Is that accurate?” or “Am I understanding this point correctly?” Again, these questions do not appear in Appendix A; however, in order to remain consistent with my research positionality, it was important to do engage in a dialogue whereby I sought to understand participant perceptions as closely as I could. Of course, I did so understanding that there are no research tools in qualitative or quantitative research methods that would allow me to know exactly what a participant meant. Again, the goal of the data collection process with the practicing leaders was to gather detailed recollections about important moments where difference *had been* a salient issue in their day-to-day experiences.

### **Emerging Leaders**

For emerging leader, I gathered their insights and ideas about how they *might* handle moments wherein different and leadership become salient issues. The interview guide presented in Appendix B was designed to address how emerging leaders had

prepared for the future, and potential leadership positions they hoped to obtain once they entered the workforce. This did not mean that emerging-leader participants did not have jobs at the time of interview. However, none of the participants reported currently having the job/career they desired after graduation. The interview questions were designed to get them to think about hypothetical situations. Moreover, they were asked to ground their responses of how they would handle such hypothetical situations in the experiences, knowledge, and practices they had accumulated and learned thus far in their lives.

Over the course of conducting interviews with emerging leaders, the protocol item that allowed participants to consider the aforementioned most read as follows: “Would you say being a minority will affect your experiences as a leader?” I then followed up with two questions, “If so, how?” or “If not, why not?” This question was integral in the conversation for two reasons. First, it foregrounded the major issues I wanted to address in the dissertation: leadership and difference. Second, it opened up the possibility that participants may foresee issues with difference and leadership, while also leaving open the possibility that it will not. It was a major goal of mine not to ask leading questions that presumed that difference and leadership would have any sort of result in participants’ experiences.

The question listed above also served as a rich opportunity to get emerging-leader participants to think more deeply about the conditions that they may be working in the future. This often took a bit more probing than in the interviews with practicing leaders. I found early on that practicing leaders were much more willing to go into detail

regarding their stories, while emerging leaders tended to want to respond with “Yes,” “No,” “Maybe,” or “I don’t know.” This could be attributed to focus on hypothetical, rather than lived, situations. In those cases, I would ask students to think about previous events in their lives that involved similar conditions – for example, being outnumbered or noticing that they were, in fact, a minority. I would ask them to reflect on how they handled such moments and how they might draw from that experience to shape how they might handle a similar situation as a leader in an organizational context. This practice often got emerging leaders into telling more stories and offering much more insight and foresight regarding the (potential) practice of managing difference and leadership.

The purpose of the interviews were to gather detailed accounts about how practicing leaders *have* managed conditions wherein difference and leadership become salient and how emerging leaders *might* handle similar conditions. Data was collected from two different samples of leaders (practicing vs. emerging), who were at different stages in their careers, in order to allow for important comparisons between and among the frames deployed and how agency gets exercised as a function of their level of socialization. I now present the steps I took to analyze the data.

### *Data Analysis*

The interview data for practicing and emerging leaders was analyzed in three steps, utilizing a “constant-comparative method” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 218) consistent with Glaser & Strauss’ (1967) grounded theory. Ellingson (2009) argues that grounded theory in qualitative research has become “seemingly conventional” (p. 59); however, there is great value in understanding phenomena from those who experience the

phenomena directly. So, to increase rigor, I utilized a constant-comparative method, which involves a close reading of the data and then using an inductive approach to generate themes and categories. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) observe that a constant-comparative method is conducted with “the inductive spirit of qualitative study, [thus] much of the coding [will be] devoted to generative [new] categories” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, pp. 219).

### **Identifying Frames – Practicing Leader**

In the first pass through the interview data collected from practicing leaders, I focused only on the moments that involved, difference and leadership that were mentioned directly by the participant. Any issues that were peripheral, were marked “no difference” or “no leadership.” This first step in the data analysis involved the open, unrestricted coding (Strauss, 1987) of “naturally” emerging categories (Lee, 1999, p. 48). I did not use a list containing *a priori* frames that stemmed from previous research about difference, leadership, or framing. Codes were drawn directly from the data. Some of the early codes were: “fight,” “party,” “debate,” “politics,” “acting,” “work,” and “a non-issue.” There were at least two dozen codes that emerged in the first passes through the data. I took several passes through the data before moving on to the next phase of analysis.

In the second phase of data analysis, I revisited the data and the first set of codes. During these passes through the data, the goal was to condense similar codes into one overarching code. Take for instance the “fight” code. After the second round of passes through the data, I realized that three codes—“fight,” “battle,” and “war”—seemed to

converge around the same set of meanings and could be captured under a single, yet fragmented frame. As a result, the three original codes were condensed into one frame: “war.” It is important to note that not all frames could be condensed. For instance, there were no additional codes that fit with the “party” code. The code was not thrown out necessarily; there simply was no need to condense the code with another code. It also took several takes through the data and the codes to condense and integrate the codes.

In the next phase of analysis, I simply went through the data and counted how many times each code appeared. If a code did not appear three or more times, it was not considered a theme as there were not enough examples in this data set to argue that the code/frame has traction. Codes that appeared three or more times were highlighted using a word processing program. Codes that did not appear three or more times were reconsidered for being condensed into another broader category, but no code “fit” with a previously condensed set of codes. This process is consistent with two of three of Owen’s (1984) criterion (recurrence and repetition) for identifying and interpreting themes in data in that terms and ideas “coalesced” around a particular “concept” (p. 275).

In the next phase of data analysis that deals with identifying frames, each code was categorized according to Fairhurst and Sarr’s (1996) five framing device categories. So, for example, after reading the examples that were coded as “war,” it became clear that the code fit with the framing device category of metaphor. The code was then categorized as such and renamed the “difference-as-war” metaphorical device. This process of categorizing codes as framing devices and then renaming codes to better



reflect the respective frame was conducted after all codes had been categorized in the previous phase.

### **Identifying Frames – Emerging Leaders**

To identify the frames emerging in the interview data collected from emerging leaders, I followed the same procedures listed above. First, I used an open coding method to identify “naturally” occurring codes (Lee, 1999, p. 48). However, one of the major challenges in identifying codes within this data set was treating this data set as unique to the data collected from practicing leaders. It was difficult to not treat the first set of codes that emerged in the practicing leaders’ interviews as a guiding list for identifying codes within data collected from emerging leaders.

To this point, I took far more passes through the data when identifying codes. Throughout this process, I consistently asked myself, “What am I missing?” To be transparent, asking that question did not prevent previous codes from the practicing leaders’ interviews. For example, the “difference-as-war” frame was particularly salient and reoccurring in the first set of data. For me, this often meant that I was drawn to language and examples in the second data set that could be linked to a war frame. In those cases, I would complete that pass through the data and go back through the data with the aim of coding for themes that did not appear in the codes emerging from the practicing leaders’ data. This practice of reflexivity, or “conscious, self-awareness” (Finlay, 2002, p. 532), was important because it allowed me to identify unique and overlapping framing devices.

Some of the codes that emerged in this stage of data analysis were unique to the codes that emerged in the data from practicing leaders. Some of the early codes were: “Things will never change,” “Reach across the aisle,” “play,” “build,” and a number of other codes. Some of the codes did overlap previous codes. These are quite different from codes from practicing leaders, such as: “war,” “performance,” “work twice as hard,” to list a few. However, some codes did emerge that were similar to practicing leaders such as the “religious/spiritual” code.

As described in detail in the analysis of the practicing leaders, I took several iterative passes through the codes with the intent to condense, when possible. For example, the code of “colloquialism” began as two codes: “Things will never change” and “It is what it is.” After several readings of the data and the respective codes, condensed codes were revisited to determine if there were enough examples to constitute a theme or pattern. Those themes were then categorized into Fairhurst and Sarr’s (1996) five categories and renamed.

### **Identifying Agency**

The second research question focused attention on how each particular frame increased, decreased, or offset the perceived agency that leaders, followers, and peers could exercise when engaging leadership and difference. As I worked iteratively to develop the codes for framing devices moving between the data and the literature (Miles & Huberman, 1994), it became clear that Framing Theory alone would not allow me to fully address RQ2. I went back to the literature to develop a strategy for unpacking the complexities, nuances, and layers of meaning within each frame and the way that layers

of meaning shaped, constricted, and opened up one's possibilities for enacting agency. One theory that helped me bridge the gap between identifying frames and their connection to the exercise of agency identifying the degree to which one can exercise agency, was Pearce and Cronen's (1980) Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) theory. I chose CMM because it fit well with my epistemological, ontological, and axiological commitments. Epistemologically, CMM takes a subjective position that focuses on how social actors make meaning as they coordinate different levels of meaning. Ontologically, it views the word as being socially constructed in communication. Axiologically, CMM has variously been described as an interpretive theory, a practical theory, and a critical theory (Barge & Pearce, 2004). Its ability to serve as a critical theory and address issues of power and control fits with my researcher position as a critical scholar.

CMM offers an appropriate theoretical and analytical lens for understanding complicated communicative events. CMM offers a number of analytical tools for investigating the multiple layers of meaning central to the development of and negotiation of a social actor's social world. For example, CMM theory offers various analytical tools and concepts for engaging the meaning making processes such as the Serpentine Model, Daisy Model, the LUUUTT Model, and the hierarchy of meaning (see, Bruss, et al., 2005, Hedman & Gesch-Karamanlidis, 2015, Pearce, 2005, 2012). For the purposes of this dissertation, CMM – coupled with Framing Theory – became an important tool for unpacking the connection between various levels of meaning

embedded in the frames deployed when minority leaders anticipatorily and/or actively address issues of difference within the workplace and agency.

My analysis draws on the hierarchy of meaning model (Pearce, 1994). The hierarchy of meaning model focuses attention on six levels of meaning within a communicative event: (1) the cultural patterns level foregrounds the communicative rules and expectations practiced within a respective community; (2) the life script level highlights the broader narratives that individual within a given culture are expected to play out in their day-to-day behaviors; (3) the relationship level focuses on the communicative expectations that emerge within our interpersonal connections; (4) the episodic level focuses on our communicative habits - or the patterns we develop in particular types of communicative contexts or situations; (5) the speech act level focuses on the specific communicative act in the moment; and lastly, (6) the content level emphasizes the way persons construct the meaning associated with the specific terms and phrases communicated (Pearce, 2005). These levels offer readers one way of explaining how participants experience their social realms.

A number of scholars have used the hierarchy of meaning model to study the meaning making processes of social actors (Montgomery, 2004; Salmon & Faris, 2006; Orbe & Camara, 2010; Swords, et al., 2014). Swords and colleagues (2014) used CMM and the hierarchy of meaning model to investigate how male college students negotiated issues of “sex, self, and society” within the context of their sexual experiences (p. 1385). As a part of a larger qualitative study, Orbe and Camara (2010) analyzed participant accounts that involved negotiating moments of discrimination experienced by

participants. For example, a White, female participant recounts her experiences on a Navy ship. She recalls that:

...when I was first checked in on my [naval] boat, this black guy started up with me right away...calling me cracker and white bread and so on and so on. I didn't know if he was messing with me because I was white or because I was new. After a couple of months I saw how this guy dealt with people of his own race, and he was embracing them and took them under his wing. After a while I knew the boat was racially charged and segregated even though it wasn't supposed to be going on. (pp. 288 – 289)

In analyzing her accounts, using CMM's hierarchy of meaning, Orbe and Camara (2010) identify the levels of meaning that are salient to the participant's meaning-making processes.

CMM Model 1: Interpretation of hierarchy of meanings for female “guilty” of DWB

Episode: Observing the Black man interacting with both Blacks and Whites over time

Contract: Coming to understand the racialized rules (e.g., segregation) of the boat

Speech Act: Black man using derogatory racial slurs to describe White man

Content: “Cracker,” “White Bread” (p. 289)

It is important to note that the authors identify four of the six levels of meaning as particularly salient. This suggests that every level of meaning may or may not emerge from the data. This point is revisited in the analysis chapters of this dissertation. By

identifying the various meaning levels, the authors were able to highlight the more important facets of the story. This was important in gaining a better understanding of how the female participant made meaning and sense of what she observed and experienced. CMM's hierarchy of meaning allowed Orbe and Camara (2010) to better understanding which parts of her story were salient by unpacking the levels of meaning permeated and shaped her perceptions and experiences at various levels.

As Orbe and Camara (2010) show us in the example above, CMM allows researchers to study how social actors create and negotiate their social reality. Furthermore, CMM offers an ontological position that one's social world is made up of various layers (meaning levels) that participants must coordinate in order to create, sustain, and modify their social world. In this study, CMM offers a framework for further understanding how leaders at two different stages of organizational socialization coordinate meaning as they make sense of the intersection of difference and leadership within their social worlds.

After identifying codes and themes, and organizing the themes by placing each into one of the framing devices forwarded by Fairhurst and Sarr (1996), I used the hierarchy of meaning model to explore how agency was associated with different frames. I followed Orbe and Camara's (2010) methods by revisiting the specific examples, stories, insights, and perceptions explained by practicing and emerging leaders within each framing device. For example, I would look at the specific examples within the transcripts that are associated with the "religious" code from data collected from emerging leaders. Take for instance this excerpt from Ian's interview:

...my number one thing (*pounds his fist into his hands*), keep God first. That's how I live. That's how I move. That's how I breathe. That's where I get my strength. Nothing I do goes without consulting him first. That's just me. This is just my opinion. God first.

Early on, it became clear that participants were consistently using terms consistent with religion (e.g., God, spirituality, church, faith, Bible) to explain how they have/will handle moments wherein difference and leadership become salient. After identifying the theme and its confirming its recurrence by counting the number of times the code appeared in the transcripts, I categorized the theme as a way of “spinning” issues of difference and leadership. Participants were using religion as a way of framing difference and leadership as something that they cannot necessary change by themselves. Instead, they rely on a Higher Power. The steps of coding, naming, and categorizing the theme allowed me to address RQ1.

To address RQ2, I drew from the hierarchy of meaning from CMM. To do so, I first had to determine which levels became salient in each example. I did this by reading through each example wherein the code appears. I would then draw from each example any details that fit within one of the levels within the hierarchy. For instance, in the above excerpt from Ian's interview, four levels of meaning are addressed: list. In terms of content, he uses the term “God” explicitly; so, I included this in my analysis CMM analysis of the religious frame. When he pounds his fist into his hand while saying keeping God first is his “number one thing,” I added this to speech act level. Then, when he says, “That's just me. This is just my opinion: God first,” he sheds light into his life

script and the role religion plays in it. Lastly, when these levels are taken together, this example speaks to a larger archetype wherein African Americans use the Black church and religion as a way of making sense of and negotiation inequalities, among other issues. In this example, four of the six levels of meaning become salient. It was not my goal to force examples to fit within all levels. Instead, it was my goal to use CMM as a lens for understanding the levels that are addressed. I completed this process of determined which levels of meaning become salient in each of the remaining examples that emerge in the data.

In the final phase of the CMM data analysis, I addressed the issue of agency. In this phase, I addressed each frame one-by-one and the levels of meanings determined to be salient within each respective frame. For instance, when addressing the role of agency and the religious spin frame, I reviewed the details of the salient levels of meaning. So, I looked at things like language use (content), identities (life scripts), and cultural narratives (archetypes) to determine if participants were drawing on the various levels and the frame for a sense of empowerment (increased agency), a reason to remain stagnant and defeated (decreased agency), or as a means of coping (neither increased or decreased). The question I asked myself at this stage of analysis is, “What does the frame and its level of meanings allow minority leaders to *do*?” Again, I drew directly from the levels of meanings I categorized in the previous paragraph to make the arguments regarding agency. Once, I completed one frame and the levels of meaning associated with it, I moved to the next frame. I repeated until the levels of meanings had



been delineated for each frame and an argument had been made regarding the degree of agency foregrounded by each frame.

### *Summary*

This chapter provides an overview of my research position, the methods used to generate the data, and the analytical tools I used to explore: (a) the frames that emerging and practicing leaders used, and (b) the relationship between framing and agency. Again, the purpose of this dissertation is to interrogate the construction of meaning in moments wherein difference becomes, or may possibly become, an integral factor. Framing theory offers one important lens for understanding how minority leaders process and respond in and to moments where difference becomes salient. Identifying the frames deployed by participants offers an important first step at getting at the complexities at the intersection of difference and leadership, but stops short of connecting the various layers of meaning constituting a communicative event with agency. To address this issue, I used the Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) theory (Pearce, 1976; Pearce & Cronen, 1980) and the hierarchy of meaning to unpack the connection between framing and agency. Framing theory and CMM served as appropriate and significant lenses for addressing the overall mission of this dissertation – gaining a richer, more complex understanding of the perceptions, behaviors, and experiences of emerging and practicing minority leaders in the context of the workplace.

## CHAPTER III

### PRACTICING LEADERS ANALYSIS

This chapter analyzes the frames articulated by practicing leaders, those leaders who currently serve in leadership positions within their respective organizations. The three research questions that guide this dissertation and analysis are:

RQ1: How do leaders frame the role of difference in their day-to-day organizational experiences?

RQ2: What is the relationship between framing and agency?

RQ3: What are the similarities and differences in the frames that practicing and emerging leaders use to engage leadership and difference?

To address the above research questions, I have organized the chapter using the framing categories described by Fairhurst and Sarr (1996): (1) metaphors, (2) jargon/catchphrases, and (3) spin. In each sub-section, RQ<sub>1</sub> is addressed as follows. First, the frame is described at broad level followed by a description of each sub-category for that particular frame with exemplars provided to give a more detailed account of how participants enact the same broad frame in nuanced, and unique ways. Next, I employ Pearce's (2004) hierarchy of meaning model, derived from his Communication Management of Meaning Theory (CMM) to organize the respective identities, relationships, and culture that are engaged, created, sustained, and/or challenged with the enactment of the respective frame. This allows me to discuss the agentic possibilities that are opened up and closed off by the specific enactments of each frame.

## **Practicing Leaders: Framing Themes**

Again, this chapter focuses on the framing devices deployed by practicing leaders. My analysis begins with the first framing device delineated by Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) – metaphorical frames.

### *Metaphorical Frames*

The first framing device Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) describe is metaphor. As a framing device, metaphors allow leaders to re-constitute meaning and they become useful when a leader “want(s) a subject to take on new meaning” (p. 101). For many participants in this study, metaphors proved quite useful in making sense of the role difference plays in shaping their day-to-day experiences as a minority leader. Three broad metaphorical frames emerged in the analysis: (1) difference-as-a war, (2) difference-as-a game, and (3) difference-as-a performance.

#### **Difference-as-a War**

Participants often framed their experiences as a minority leader as a war between opposing forces. The difference as war frame often refers to a war between and among the races and/or gender. While many participants draw on a broader difference-as-war metaphor acknowledging that that they perceive that they are engaged in a war given their minority status, the metaphor is enacted in three related, yet unique ways. First, participants draw on the frame to make sense of being attacked. Second, some participants draw on the frame to explain how they find refuge and protection during times of war. In a third move, leaders draw on the frame to consciously perform the role of neutrality and exhibit a level of consciousness whereby they are able to choose to

acknowledge but not engage the war. Below, I unpack each of the three approaches to the difference-as-war metaphorical frame.

### *I Am Under Attack*

The first way participants draw on the difference-as-war metaphor emphasizes the experience of minority leaders feeling that they are being attacked. Participants often speak to a larger war between members of the majority who take up a privileged position in the organizational setting and members of a minority social group who take up a less privileged, more marginalized status. As the examples provided below illustrate, the “I am under attack” articulation of the difference-as-war metaphor shapes and constrains how minority leaders view the culture of the organization, how they interact with others, and how they view themselves as organizational actors.

Take for instance Angela who is fighting for greater representation of minorities in the presentations offered at her library. She recalls:

So, for example, we had a search for a person who would work on rare materials. So one of the things I asked, “Okay, so have we started looking at communities of color?” It was interesting just how they're not even considered, you know? So it's always that push that I'm pushing against this huge wall...So it's this constant battle to have them recognize that there are others we can go after [who] are African-Americans, or Hispanics, or even Asian(s)...

Here, Angela draws on language that reveals how she has come to frame this event and similar events that followed. She characterizes this event as a battle within the larger context, or culture that begets a war between majority and minority representation.

Simultaneously, this frame provides Angela with a particular identity. She is a target because she is a crusader of good. She is a target whose ideas are under attack and is being kept out by the wall because she challenges the normality of organizational systems that sustain the representation of certain groups in certain positions of the hierarchy. This frame also sets up a constrained relational dynamic by which Angela can understand how she engages her counterparts. Her counterparts are either allies or enemies. Given she is outnumbered and under-resourced in comparison to her enemies, it makes sense that Angela feels like she is pushing against a wall, not being heard, and thus, under attack.

Angela is able to face her enemies. She knows what they look like. She knows who they are. She knows whether or not they support her push for increased minority representation. In Veronica's case, the difference -as-war plays out a differently. Veronica also reports feeling a sense of being under attack. However, as the next passage shows, she complicates the notion of being under attack. Veronica explains:

Last year, I was personally attacked through a complaint that was filed against me using an anonymous system that the [organization] supports for people to blow the whistle on unethical behavior. I think the system is good, but I think being anonymous doesn't present you with the opportunity to confront your accuser. Now, they investigated and nothing was found out of it. I was basically accused of misusing my staff. That was the most difficult time for me, because it's okay for you to talk about me. I don't really care about that kind of stuff. But when you attack my integrity, then you're taking it to a whole other level. I

realized this was their attempt to dissuade me from continuing on...There were other Black [leaders] that had been here; and in some instances they were run off. Veronica also draws on a war metaphor to frame her experience as a war and observes that it has gone on for some time. When Veronica talks about others who have been “run off,” she reveals that this war against people of color did not begin with her. Veronica's observations begin to complicate this notion of being under attack within this bigger war because Veronica does not know who her enemies are. The anonymous system allows individuals to “attack” Veronica without warning.

When taking the accounts of Angela and Veronica into consideration, it makes sense that a seasoned leader like Karen, who also draws on the war metaphorical frame, offers the following advice to emerging leaders: “be aware of your surroundings” and “...watch your back.” While her comments are brief, Karen's advice succinctly captures the thread that connects different uses of the “I am under attack” enactment of the difference-as-war metaphorical frame.

The “under attack” approach to difference-as-war is tied to preservation and survival. Participants who engage the frame in this way fight to protect something that the enemy seeks to destroy. This may involve fighting to protect one's visibility as a person of color in a high-ranking position. Or, this may involve fighting to protect one's integrity as a Black leader. In either case, if the Black leader loses the war, they disappear with very little, to no second line of defense.

### *I Am Prepared to Fight*

The second approach to the frame is the “I am prepared” approach. This enactment of the difference-as-war frame allows a number of the leaders in this study to make two arguments. First, leaders argue that a war is underway in their respective departments, organizations, and/or industries. This resonates with the previous enactment of the difference-as-war metaphorical frame. The second argument notably distinguishes this enactment of the frame. The “I am prepared” approach allows minority leaders to make sense of their positions not as under-resourced targets that eventually will be torn down, run away, or defeated by the superpower majority but as warriors ready to fight back, survive, and conquer. They are ready to win the battles. They are prepared to meet force with force. Leaders suggest certain communicative strategies can be tapped into to provide them with a fighting chance.

The framing of difference-as-war and the “I am prepared” approach begins to play out in Chris’ response to the question, “If you could go back in time, what would you tell your younger self about what [to] expect as an African American leader?” He responds, “I would go back and tell my younger self to prepare for resistance.” He adds, “Winning just few small battles will never win you the war.” Chris’ language choices clearly point to a war when he couples terms such as: “resistance,” “battles,” “war,” and “winning.” Together, these terms reveal how, at least in part, Chris makes sense of the intersection of leadership and race. Concomitantly, his closing comments suggest that he has developed a strategy for fighting the war. It is important to note that he is not suggesting that he is a target who will be taken down. Instead, he suggests there may be

formula, which involves a willingness to lose some of the battles in order to win the bigger war.

Although Chris does not offer a more detailed account of how to manage the small battles in ways that lead to winning the bigger war, some participants do. In this excerpt, Monica gives a bit more insight into how she handles the war:

With colleagues, I think the way I do it is just to continue to go about my work and let the work show that I actually do know what's going on. Or, [I let] another individual speak on my behalf. It is actually more effective to have other individuals who are higher ranking and who have a little bit more clout to essentially fight my battles for me because there are some thing I don't need to deal with. I've even had them say, after I've explained the situation, "Listen, I got you covered. Don't worry about it. Go about and do what you need to do, I'll take this on."

In Monica's experiences with war, marginalization and isolation have become a part of the territory. She engages the language of war when she uses terms such as: "fight" and "battles." When these terms connect with being "covered" by fellow colleagues, Monica gives some insight into how she enacts the "I am prepared" approach to the frame. She is prepared because she has developed a strategy that involves connecting with colleagues who become allies who will fight for her. This allows her to go back to completing her tasks.



Bridgette connects with Chris and Monica in that she describes conditions that involve having to prove a minority “know[s] what’s going on” *and* can perform the job well. Bridgette states:

So I have to be careful how I respond to certain things, and it wears down on you because you hold them back. You’re not being your true self at all times. Also, being an isolate. You are marginalized. You are isolated. They don’t think you’re smart. Once you understand all those things, then the fight is different. Then you know how to fight. You’re equipped if you know what your enemy thinks of you. I shouldn’t call them that, but, they think you’re stupid. You will not get the smiles and small talk after a meeting or before it. You will have some colleagues that will reach out to you, but that type of behavior does not go along with being a Black person who’s outnumbered in an organization.

Bridgette also uses language that connects with a war metaphorical frame. When she refers to the “fight being different” and knowing “what [her] enemy thinks,” she makes it clear how she makes sense of being a minority, specifically a racial minority, who is “outnumbered in an organization.” As her comments suggest, Bridgette is prepared to change the nature of the fight because she has gathered important intelligence that will allow regarding the opposition’s stance. She knows what they think, so she is prepared to fight.

In the final lines of the excerpt, Bridgette also hints that some colleagues, while few, will “reach out” to her, possibly with the intent to help the “outnumbered” leader. When asked to share any advice he would give a younger, emerging minority leader

working in similar conditions, Charles adds to Bridgette's view that organizational connections can be helpful during times of war. Charles advises:

...make sure that you find a partner, not a love partner, but somebody you can confide in – somebody who, when you are and out, you can come in and close the door and say, "Look, I'm just down and out. I just need somebody to talk to. I need somebody to cry to. I need a shoulder." Somebody needs to be there for you.

Charles' statement can be read as having little to do with race and more to do with the pressures of being a new leader facing the organizational pressures of being in the top rungs of an institution's hierarchy. However, this comes at the end of an hour-long interview that involves a number of examples about his experiences as a Black leader, including comparing organizational conditions to working on "Uncle Johnny's farm." For Charles then, this advice is not meant for members of majority status.

Although the advice and accounts of Chris, Monica, Bridgette, and Charles vary in terms of length and detail, each engage a war metaphor to frame their experiences and approaches to difference in the context of leadership. This becomes evident each time a participant references war (e.g., battles, allies, being "covered," and so on). How each participant enacts the metaphor both threads together their experiences and highlights a unique approach to the metaphor. In contrast to the "under attack" approach of the war metaphor, the exemplars presented in this sub-section illustrate a different approach. Leaders who enact this approach are not adopting the identities or behaviors of a sitting duck. These leaders intend to fight. Not only will they put up a fight, they intend to be

prepared. They are adopting identities and behaviors associated with action. They are gathering information that can be used as ammunition. They are creating relationships with appropriate allies. They are also prepared for a possible loss.

For participants, the prepared approach to a war metaphor opens up and closes off unique ways of exercising agency in the context of difference and leadership. When leaders draw on the language consistent with this approach (e.g., fight, equipped, battles, allies, enemies, prepare), they tap into an identity of action or empowerment. They adopt an identity with a greater degree of power and moreover, a willingness to exercise that power in order to protect their status, prove their belongingness, and outsmart the enemy. One arena wherein the empowered identity plays out in a significant way is that of the organizational relationship. This arena provides the empowered soldier the space to begin to manipulate others. It is within each interaction with fellow colleagues that the soldier gets prepared. S/he begins to weed out allies and enemies. S/he begins to determine who will fight with, for, and against him/her when the battles begin (and end).

When leaders approach the difference-as-war frame with a sense of “I am prepared to fight,” this opens up a need to be more assertive. While this frame overlaps with the “I am under attack” approach as Black leaders detect a contentious relationship with White colleagues, the “I am prepared to fight” approach takes on a different response to the ongoing war. Within this approach, Black leaders’ agency is connected more toward being assertive and fighting back. To be assertive, Black leaders are encouraged to: (1) develop relationships with colleagues who can serve as allies; (2)

collect intelligence of the inner workings of the enemy; and (3) create a strategy for fighting each battle.

### *I Am Not Fighting*

The third and final approach to the difference-as-war metaphorical frame encourages an approach that involves disengagement. Similar to the previously discussed enactments of this particular frame, particulars engage language consistent with a war. Some use terms and phrases such as: “shielded,” “fighting the power,” and “armed.” While some participants engage language consistent with the frame, their approach to the war is unique to previous enactments of the war metaphorical frame because they are unwilling to fight. They are not targets under attack. They are not soldiers who have the allies and resources to put up a good fight, they choose not to engage enacting a position of neutrality similar to Switzerland.

Naomi offers an intriguing glimpse into the difference-as-war frame, but “I am not fighting” approach. For Naomi, one of her mentors and colleagues served as an ally to help her avoid the war. Grateful of her mentors’ efforts, she explains:

As much as I want to say “hard work” pays off, I know that I have just been fortunate. I am at an institution with the top three people in my direct organizational chart identify as Black men; and when I was hired into my area, my boss was a Black woman. I have been shielded from the harsh realities that race play in our society as a young Black leader.

Naomi’s words suggest she is quite aware of the conditions created when difference – specifically, race – and leadership connect for her. However, unlike the language of the

previous two approaches to a war metaphor frame, Naomi is not helpless. She is not quite engaged either, because she has been shielded by those who are higher up in the organizational hierarchy. As her language suggests, there is a war, but she does not have to fight in it.

Ron offers a different way to enact this approach when he unapologetically states, “I am not fighting the power. I have no interest in that, nor am I any sort of Uncle Tom. It’s hard enough just being me.” In this moment of the interview, Ron introduces individuality to the war. He counters the notion that African Americans tend to enact collectivistic behaviors, particularly in organizational settings. Similar to others, he acknowledges the war. He is aware that something is happening between and among his colleagues. However, in a move that highlights the nuances of this approach, he strategically chooses not to engage the war.

In an interesting move, Katelyn enacts the “I am not fighting” approach in a way that blends previous participants’ responses. She acknowledges the war. She even suggests fighting the fight at times. However, she suggests that there are times she does not. So, unlike Ron, she is not necessarily always outside looking in, but she is not always fighting the fight. Katelyn explains that:

...as a Black woman here, so often you’re sort of stripped your femininity, right? They bind you to the stereotype of the strong Black woman and so you can’t be soft or vulnerable. So, you probably have fatigues, and you just go with it. But I don’t want to be armed all the time.

As Katelyn explains, she does not wish to “be armed all the time.” She does not wish to serve as a soldier who must consistently arm herself. Furthermore, she is disinterested in constantly donning the proper garments of war – fatigues. This means that being at war begins before she even leaves her home in the morning. It begins when she chooses what she wears to work. Consequently, minority leaders who are embattled, must remain dressed, armed, and thus prepared for war at all times. More specifically, for Black women leaders, they must be prepared to fight to earn and maintain the image of the “strong Black woman,” even when they do not wish to adorn that identity.

When leaders engage the frame in this way, a higher level of consciousness – with regard to the between and among minorities and majorities – comes to the foreground. This frame allows leaders to articulate and exercise a level of consciousness that involves both acknowledging the presence of an ongoing war while also enacting agency that includes avoiding that war in one way or another. As the following exemplars illustrate, leaders who engage the “difference is a war, but I am not fighting” approach to a war frame elicit an approach that suggests the leaders are onlookers unwilling to involve themselves with the chaos of war. Instead, they, or those around them choose, to protect themselves from the negative possibilities associated with war.

### **Difference-as-a-Game**

The difference-as-game metaphorical frame is similar to the difference as war frame in that there are presumed winners and losers and a thus, there is a need to behave and communicate strategically in order to win the game. The game frame differs from the war frame in that there is a presumption that minority leaders have a choice as to

whether or not they “play the game.” As most of the responses in the preceding subsection suggest, there is often little choice in terms of whether or not minority leaders go to war as that decision is made up for them because they are different. In terms of the game metaphor, most agree that there is a choice as to whether or not one plays.

Coretta states that although she is an African American leader, many of her followers have said: “I will follow you wherever you go because I know I will be valued, I will be valuable, and we make a really a great team.” While race seems to play a peripheral role in the game Coretta plays with a “great team” of followers, Katelyn believes that race is “one strike” toward her role as a leader. Put into context, she says:

...most people don’t look at me and initially think that I’m the (rank and title) of the (organization). So that’s one strike. So therefore, I’m not really taken seriously...frankly as a function of my gender and my race. It’s the same institutionalized racism that kind of sets up barriers to make things hard, like getting people to value the kind of work we do.

For Katelyn, before she can make any organizational moves, decisions, even mistakes, she is already at a disadvantage. Whereas her White colleagues get three swings at the ball, she only gets two. While other colleagues get two chances to knock down the pins, she gets just one. This sets up a certain interaction dynamic wherein she must be very strategic and calculating so as to make the most out of the two strikes she has left.

Mark extends this point in the following example. When asked to elaborate on some of his experiences as an African American leader, he responds with:

There were times where race is definitely the elephant in the room...when lessons and things that people are not willing to hear from me and they'll have to get it confirmed elsewhere before they'll start to believe. And I think initially [that] bothered me more than it does now, and it's just part of the job, like you don't have to agree with me, you don't even have to listen to me. That's fine... I'm not playing this game with you. And so, I think that used to bother me more but now in my career -- I've been doing this a while, no, it doesn't bother me.

Mark shows us that there may be a game being played, and while he acknowledges that it is happening, he refuses to engage it.

Cheryl's comments connect to those of Mark when she says:

The one consistency that I have found in the literature is hard work, but people rarely talk about the value in being authentic. We want to excel and often we subscribe to the various games that are played in different industries and what I have found is that type of leadership leaves you empty.

Each excerpt blatantly refers to a game being played. Both suggest the "games" are an inevitable, unfortunately, and unnecessary work condition with which they function.

Unfortunately for Mark, the games circumvent his efforts to provide input and feedback. Cheryl mentions another unfortunate possibility of the "various games that are played" when she states the games "leave you empty." Here, she speaks to the loss of playing the games. According to Cheryl, minority leaders who try to play the game lose something, as they are left empty. Cheryl, along with Mark and Coretta, also provide interesting



insights into the identities, relationships, and organizational cultures that become possible when framing difference and leadership as a game.

The game frame becomes important as African American leaders learn the ins-and-outs of their respective organizational hierarchies. In this context, leaders are interested in gaining a better understanding of two sets of rules. First, they must become familiar with the rules that apply to everyone playing the game. The second set of rules become even more important as Black leaders must learn the rules that are particular to underlying game(s) being played by leaders who take up a minority subject position.

### **Difference-as-a-Performance**

The notion of “play” takes on different meaning when participants describe their experiences by drawing on the difference-and-leadership-as-a-performance metaphor. By drawing on this metaphor, participants suggest that they play some kind of organizational caricature of their authentic self. For various reasons, participants cannot behave or portray an authentic self. The difference as performance frame may be caused by the rarity of minority leaders. In part, because of their rarity, they stand out (Kanter, 1977) and this may cause leaders to feel as if they must perform in ways that will allow them to blend in. They may also perform in response to a prescribed role that others hold them to.

The difference and leadership as performance gets articulated as leaders use terms such as: “acting,” “project,” “scenes,” and “character.” Cheryl draws on the performance metaphor and offers reasons why it is important to put on a performance as a minority leader. Loosely quoting poet Paul Laurence Dunbar to describe how she

negotiates moments wherein her difference is salient, Cheryl offers the following, “I just go within because one of the things that has to -- you wear the mask. I don't know if you've heard this saying: ‘You wear the mask so no one sees your pain.’” Wearing the “mask” is important for Cheryl as she manages the emotional consequences of being a minority leader. This is a choice she has made. This sets up a particular way of interacting with her colleagues as she chooses not to share her pain and emotion with colleagues.

Charles claims that being a Black leader has thrust him into the “limelight” and has affected him emotionally as well. He shares:

...I started being, you know, in the limelight, people saw me and heard me and encouraged me to pursue the doctorate. So I think that in that, I kind of got a bit upset then because being one of the first Blacks to lead, everybody expected me not to succeed.

Although he was encouraged by some to lead and advance, Charles felt that he was almost being watched in order for others to see him fail. Unlike Cheryl and although he was given very clear directions from White colleagues, Charles was unwilling to put on a mask while on stage. He goes back to a time when he had been thrust into the “limelight” at work. As he recalls, someone approached him and said, "You're an excellent leader, but you really need to watch how you talk to White folks." He goes on to explain his response to his colleague's advice.

I'm saying I need to watch how I talk to everybody, and I work hard on that because I know that sometimes I can just say point blank, you know, that's not

going to be. And so I really had a problem with that. And so, on the story that I tell you is that you come up to me and you say to me that "That was an excellent thing. But when a White person raised his hand, you talk to him, you kind of were demeaning and I know you didn't intend to do it but that's how it came up." And I said, "Well, how did it come up?" I said, "If he asked the question that a Black person had already asked, "Yeah, but you have to remember now, you can't talk to Whites like you talk to Blacks." Well, why can't you? And so my whole thing is always that I try to treat everybody as I would treat myself. And a lot of people have problem with that especially if they're White.

Charles refuses to change characters depending on the audience. For him, how he speaks (or performs) in an interaction with someone who identifies as White, Black, Latino, Asian, etc. does not change. Thus, he refuses to play a caricature of himself. The only character that he can play in an interaction is an unfiltered version of him.

Katelyn begins to complicate the difference-and-leadership-as-a-performance metaphor by describing how she manages playing more than one character on more than one stage in any given day.

At the end of the day, I separate. I separate the me who is the professional -- I'm a professional at all times -- but the me who is here and the me who goes home 'cause those are two different worlds. Although the two worlds are one, they blend together, but I separate the two worlds sometimes and that's how I am able to manage is by having those distinct worlds so that helps me.

Katelyn begins to complicate the notion that there are two separate performances that are distinct and yet overlapping. Some elements of her character must remain consistent (the person who is professional) and yet other elements may be distinct and enacted depending on the context.

Performance is connected to how one exercises his/her individuality against the backdrop of pre-determined caricatures. Black leaders are not acting in a way divorced from social influences. Instead, as other actors, Black leaders must choose from a number of scripts written for actors facing similar circumstances. Such characters include: (1) the angry, threatening Black leader; (2) the Uncle Tom; or (3) the Black leader who beats all odds.

### *Jargon and Catchphrase Frames*

Another category of framing devices is jargon and catchphrases. Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) argue that jargon and catchphrases allow leaders to frame an issue or situation in ways that are familiar to a particular context or set of conditions. In the case of this dissertation, the context involves the intersection of social difference and leadership where minority leaders attempt to make sense of their experiences in predominately White, (and/or) male, (and/or) heterosexual departments, organizations, and industries.

### **Twice as Hard Catchphrase**

One catchphrase participants use to make sense of the intersection difference and leadership is: “I have to work twice as hard to get half as far.” This catchphrase captures the notion that members of minority social group must work harder than the hardest

worker, because they take up a social position within a minority social group. Below, examples of this catchphrase are discussed in more depth.

The idiom that has been a staple in the working African American community is: “we have to work twice as hard to get half as far” as White colleagues. The origins of this idiom are unknown and have not necessarily been quantified; yet, interestingly, the catchphrase gets stated as an undisputable fact. The logic undergirding the aphorism is that the U.S. is a society set up by and for White Americans and thus, Whites have an advantage in the various systems created by and for them, including organizational systems. Furthermore, some feel that African Americans are set up systematically to fail. In the context of this study, the “twice as hard” catchphrase served as a catchall for understanding how minority leaders experienced difference in organizational setting. Put another way, participants who used this catchphrase use the “twice as hard” phrase in ways that seem to be the final answer. There seems to be no need to expand on the idea. “Twice as hard” seems to be enough. It is used to encapsulate their entire set of experiences. This point is poignant in the first two examples shared below.

When asked: “If you could go back in time, what would you tell your younger self about what you can expect to experience as an African American leader?” Deborah was clear and concise in her response, “...you will have to work twice as hard as some of your other peers of other races.” When pushed for a deeper explanation, she responded with, “That pretty much sums it up,” which highlights the power and utility of catchphrases – particularly this one in this context.

Another participant simply refused to expand on the phrase. When asked what it has been like to represent one of the few African Americans to reach the military rank she has, Jean stated that: “Sometimes I have to work twice as hard to prove my skills and abilities.” When asked for an example, she said, “There are too many.” When I pushed for another example stating that, “one would be great.” She firmly responded with, “...just trust me. It’s twice as hard.” After a bit of silence and in hopes of not pushing Jean too far, I moved on to the next question, clear that the catchphrase was intended to frame her experiences in sum.

One participant, Brandy, was willing to expand on her statement, “I do believe we as African American women have to work twice as hard to earn promotions and pay increases.” Brandy offers:

We have to prove our point on minor and major issues that others do not; and if we win the argument or are able to implement an idea, we have to be willing to sink with the ship when others are given life jackets. Because of this I believe that we (minority leaders) are our own worst critics and make things harder on ourselves than we should.

Brandy’s commentary certainly draws on the “game” or “war” metaphor when she talks about “winning” an argument. She even begins to get at what could be called a “sinking ship” metaphor. What draws together and helps Brandy make sense of the different metaphors is the overarching catchphrase, “we have to work twice as hard.” When competing to “win” in an argument, she has to be willing to go above and beyond her White colleagues. She must be willing to “sink with the ship.” She must be aware that

her White colleagues will have an advantage that she does not have – life jackets. She will have to work “twice as hard” to survive in a sinking ship. In her final statement, Brandy claims White colleagues are not solely responsible for the conditions with which minority leaders must “work twice as hard.” She suggests Black women also play a major role in maintaining such conditions by being overly critical of one’s self. The identities that become possible when minority leaders engage the “twice as hard” catchphrase are discussed in more detail below.

Twice-as-hard gets connected to a need to overcome blatant and subversive inequalities in the workplace. Leaders who enact this frame argue that the “system” has been set up for Blacks to fail. As a result, Blacks must work harder than their White counterparts to be taken seriously. There is this sense that Black leaders need to prove their value to the organization. The idea of having to prove one’s value is not reserved for Black leaders. However, it is in the context of difference and leadership that proving one’s value becomes more difficult for certain leaders – Black leaders – because Black leaders must make up for that which gets tainted by race.

### *Spin*

Another type of frame leaders use to make sense of their organizational experiences is spin. Spin allows leaders to frame their experiences as “positive” or “negative” (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996, p. 101). Leaders use spin to help tip the scale toward one conclusion or another. Participants in this study use spin in two distinct ways. First, some participants draw on religious epithets to spin negative organizational conditions into something more positive. Secondly, some leaders draw on what I call a “legacy”

spin. The “legacy” spin connects participants to previous minority leaders who faced similar (or possibly worse) working conditions. The “legacy” spin, in some cases, also connects participants to future leaders who may face the same – but hopefully better – working conditions.

### **Religious Spin**

Practicing leaders repeatedly used spin to re-frame difference and leadership from a negative, hopeless, and tenuous relationship among people to a more positive relationship that has all types of possibilities when God is in charge. Some draw on the metaphor to describe how they have come to hold a leadership role. Others draw on the metaphorical frame to describe their approach to leadership and how they behave in moments of conflict in the workplace. In any case, a higher power is in control of how difference and leadership connect in the participant’s experiences.

For Keith, religious spin becomes a useful framing device in moments wherein difference plays a significant role in shaping his workplace interactions. Keith says, “I have learned to trust God in all situations because he will give you wisdom to know how to lead. God has done some extraordinary things through people to show me He is in control.” For Keith then, God is responsible for providing Keith with the knowledge necessary for leading others.

Deb extends Keith’s point when asked to offer advice to minorities seeking leadership roles. She suggests that leaders “[a]lways remain professional, and continue to take courses/training to advance yourself beyond what is required of you. And continue to keep Christ at the head of everything you do—then you will succeed.” As



Deb's advice suggests, it is important for emerging leaders to follow workplace rules (e.g., professionalism) and continue honing work-related skills. This advice could be offered to a leader of any race, gender, class, or age. However, she ends the comment by suggesting that God is an important factor in order to achieve success. Essentially, Deb uses the religious spin to credit God with the power to make emerging leaders successful – that is if they choose to make Him the master of their fate. It is interesting that this part of Deb's advice seems to be directed to the emerging African American leader – a point that becomes more apparent by the comments Ashley makes below.

Ashley also uses a religious spin to provide context for explaining why she could develop the skills needed to become a successful leader. When asked how she has developed into the leader she is today, without hesitation, she states:

...and so, that's why you hear a lot of African-American leaders especially say the church was a -- you know, it was a foundation for them. And so I do pray all the time...I've been a member of the church since I was nine and was going to all kinds of things and that was the epitome of getting where I am because I knew how to pray in public, how to talk in public. We had speeches and all those things. That's where you learn.

As Ashley claims, the church serves as a practice facility where emerging leaders go to develop skills that will benefit them in their respective leadership roles. Interestingly, Ashley suggests that the church is specifically important to developing African American leaders as if the Black church is a safe haven for Blacks – much like it was

during slavery and the Civil Rights Movement – to secretly develop the skills that will help them succeed in a predominately white setting.

For Coretta, the religious spin allows her to make sense of how she negotiates the workplace. She says,

I have what I call my personal council of advisors. I mean there is this proverb that says,

“The wise person has many counselors.” I [have] a lot of counselors. I [have] this set who I want to talk to about this, this set who I want to talk about this, lots of people that I will reach out to depending on the situation, depending on the decision I have to make. Have some mentors in place. And again going back to that courage, you [have] to be courageous, because there will be people at every stage of your climb who will try to eclipse your wings.

Coretta draws on an old proverb to explain how she handles the people who “try to eclipse [her] wings.” She has strategically created a network of mentors with whom she can speak when a problem emerges. Similar to the previous examples, Coretta is prepared because of her spiritual connection.

The religion spin is linked to a greater sense of individual agency. Leaders suggest that by trusting in a higher power, they are able to negotiate and overcome issues complicated by difference. Interestingly, the religion spin does not necessarily change the conditions with which issues of difference and leadership emerge. However, religion does provide the individual Black leader with a way out when such issues emerge. For some, religion, or more specifically religious contexts, provides opportunities to develop

skills (e.g., public speaking and networking) that will help them perform. For others, religion provides internal guidance and direction for negotiating issues in the workplace.

### **Legacy Spin**

Another way that participants' make sense of the connection between difference and leadership is by spinning their experiences as a part of larger purpose that began before them and will continue after them. Take for instance Ashley's summary of her why she works hard although she describes much of what she experiences as "challenging." She says, "I believe my due diligence will make inroads for the next person." If she does the work and experiences the growing pains that come with serving as a minority leader, she will create a possibility for others in the future. She spins what she goes through as necessary for the next generation of minority leaders. The challenge thus becomes less about the negative challenges she faces and more about the positivity in the possibilities she creates for others.

Charles offers a more specific incident in which he confronts a White colleague in front of his peers:

...everybody was kind of scared because they were appalled that it came out like that, but then later on...it is, "I'm so glad you said that. How can you have said that? Well, I couldn't have ever said that like you said it. You really gave me something to think about. I hadn't thought about it as being a racist thing." I said, "What do you think?" I've lived through the Civil Rights Movement. I still have to live through that." And so I think a lot about what Martin Luther King and all those guys did for me. I have to be a voice now. I can't afford to be quiet. A lot of

people say, "You know, you had to go where you had to go." No, you [have] to say things because that's why we're where we are, because people stood up with what we believed in.

A major reason that Charles spoke up against things that he perceives to be racist is because it is his duty, because the Black leaders' who came before him fought for his ability to be a leader in a predominantly White organization who can speak his truth. He reaches back for motivation to conquer race issues that he faces today:

...so I think I've done quite a bit and I'm very happy, but I would like to say that I always think that people should recognize that you don't get places on your own. There are other people, you know, they blaze the trail for you and you come through it.

A different participant, Shirley, continues Charles' thoughts and goes on to list the names of some of the trailblazers who she believes blazed the trail she know journeys. Shirley says that,

[Some] want to see that right-now gratification and you don't get that in leadership sometimes. It's a long time coming. Sometimes you may not even see it or hear it. There are so many of our leaders who are dead and gone. So many people who were involved in the Civil Rights movement, you don't hear their name(s), but they played a role. Martin, and Malcom, and Medgar, and you know, Fannie, those were the faces. And, ya' know, Fannie was a face that you were able to say that was not the most "educated" – ya' know, Fannie Lou Hamer. Those were faces that you knew, but there were more faces like those

that you don't know. And they led, and they sacrificed because they knew it would be a better day for those who came after them.

It seems that some minority leaders have a working list of previous minority leaders that have been responsible for chartering unmarked territory (for blacks). Leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Medgar Evers have become inspirational, iconic even, because they were able to blaze the trail for future minorities.

Interestingly, this frame, along with each frame mentioned above, offers more than a way to make sense of their experiences as minority leaders. Each frame also provides a way of behaving and communicating in a particular moment. As data suggest, each frame affords a certain degree of agency. Certain choices become plausible within each frame. Some frames highlight certain realities that subsequently increase a leader's sense of agency. Others decrease the sense of agency. In some cases, as the next subsection illustrates, frames have the potential to have a neutral impact on leader agency. Next, I draw on Pearce and Cronen's (1980) Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) hierarchy of meaning model to interrogate how each frame connects to varying degrees of agency.

### **Practicing Leaders: CMM Analysis**

The first section of this data analysis addressed RQ1 which asked: How do leaders frame the role of difference in their day-to-day organizational experiences? In unpacking the specific frames practicing leaders enact when making sense of workplace events wherein social differences become salient, six unique framing devices emerge: (1) difference is a war; (2) difference is a game; (3) difference is a performance; (4)

religion will prevail; (5) leadership is twice as hard for minorities; and (6) being different while functioning as a leader is a part of a legacy that is larger than me (the minority leader).

Investigating the framing patterns of minority leaders serves as one of the major impetuses for this dissertation research project. A second major goal of this analysis is to capture, reflect, and highlight the complexities of each framing device. To this aim, RQ2 probes: What is the relationship between framing and agency?

During the ongoing iterative processes involved with interpreting and analyzing the framing devices used by participants, it became apparent that RQ2 was overly simplistic. When looking at the data, a more appropriate question is, “To what degree does each framing device facilitate or inhibit agency?” RQ2 is designed to interrogate if, and how particular frames encourage (increase), discourage (decrease), or play no role (neutral) in how agentic participants become when drawing on that frame in that moment.

This next section of analysis focuses on how each framing device endorses varying degrees of agency. To this aim, I draw Pearce and Cronen’s CMM theory (Pearce, 1976; 2005; Pearce & Cronen, 1980) to identify possible resources for agency within each frame. I draw specifically from the hierarchy model of actor’s meaning as an analytic framework because it allows for the possibility that agency can be generated (or prevented) by different elements of the meaning-making (framing) process. This then offers an opportunity to better understand and account for the varying degrees of agency

that emerge as leaders access certain frames in specific instances. I begin this next phase of analysis with the difference-as-war metaphor and the “I am under attack” approach.

*Difference is a War and I am Under Attack*

The “I am under attack” approach decreases the degree of agency afforded to minority leaders when the frame gets deployed. The layers of meanings are detailed in Figure 1.1.

Archetype: Cultural understanding that members of minority social status are outnumbered in upper levels of organizational hierarchies and this can create tension in the workplace.
Life Script: Identity of the under resourced, unwelcomed target
Contract: Me vs. Them; Subordinate vs. Superior; Minority vs. Majority
Episode(s): Minorities are worn down or “run off.”
Speech Act: Minorities must “watch their back(s),” and “be aware of their surroundings.”
Content: “battle,” “attack,” “confront,” “war,” “pushing back”

**Figure 1.1 Difference is a War and I am Under Attack CMM Analysis**

By honing in on the life script and contract levels of the meaning making processes, it becomes evident that the minority leader is expected to behave in ways with which they do not exercise agency. Instead, they are expected to adopt an identity (and thus, communicate accordingly), with a narrative that positions the minority leader as

subordinate to his/her colleagues who are of a majority status. The minority leader is expected to behave like a target that, much like a literal target, remains still and subject to the forces and activities of the armed assailant.

*Difference is a War and I am prepared to Fight*

The next approach to this metaphorical frame is the “I am prepared to fight” approach. The levels of meaning for this approach are delineated in Figure 1.2.

Archetype: Cultural understanding that members of minority social status are outnumbered in upper levels of organizational hierarchies and this can create tension in the workplace.

Life Script: Identity of the resourced leader who is ready to fight.

Contract: Use my resources (e.g., allies and information) to fight back.

Episode(s): Resist

Speech Act: When met with aggression, find a way to fight back.

Content: “resistance,” “win,” “battles,” “fight,” “cover,” “isolate,” “marginalized,” “enemy,” “equipped”

**Figure 1.2 Difference is a War and I am Prepared to Fight CMM Analysis**

In contrast to the “I am under attack” approach, the “I am prepared to fight” approach increases the degree of agency afforded to leaders. When leaders make sense of difference and leadership as a war that they must be prepared to fight in (and win), an



important shift occurs at the life script and contract levels. In terms of the life script, minority leaders transition from sitting ducks to engaged fighters. This switch in identity scripts plays an integral role in changing the degree of agency afforded to leaders, because they are now positioned to act.

According to participants in this study, that action occurs at a specific level of the CMM meaning making process – contracts. According to Swords, et al. (2014), citing Pearce and Cronen (1980), the contract level includes “a system of formal and/or informal rules that guide two or more individuals’ communication” (p. 1385). Contracts between three major groups become central to the “I am prepared to fight” approach: (1) minority leaders and allies; (2) allies and members of the majority; and (3) minority and majority members. Participants report that these relationships allow them to mobilize and fight back against members of the majority during times of war in the workplace. These contracts offer participants the opportunities to exercise their abilities to fight back. Either they fight back directly, or their allies fight back on their behalf. In either case, their identities as fighters and their relationships with allies offer them a greater sense of agency.

### *Difference is War and I am Switzerland*

In the third and final approach to the difference-as-war metaphor, participants deploy a complicated approach I label “I am Switzerland.” This approach is complicated because it can be read as both increasing and decreasing the agency made available to minority leaders. I argue that this point makes this framing device and approach unique to any other frame described in this dissertation. In sum, this can be attributed to the

argument that the approach involves perceived inactivity, a heightened degree of consciousness, and yet, subversive action. Before further explaining the complexities of this approach, I unpack the levels of the hierarchy of meaning in Figure 1.3.

<p>Archetype: Cultural understanding that members of minority social status are outnumbered in upper levels of organizational hierarchies and this can create tension in the workplace.</p> <p>Life Script: “I am Switzerland.”</p> <p>Contract: Do not engage the battle or arm yourself.</p> <p>Episode(s): Do not pick a side based on race.</p> <p>Speech Act: Remain neutral. Do not choose a side.</p> <p>Content: “shielded,” “harsh realities,” “fighting the power,” “Uncle Tom”</p>
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**Figure 1.3 Difference is a War and I am Switzerland CMM Analysis**

Again, the “I am Switzerland” approach can be read as one that decreases and increases agency. To some degree, the frame can decrease agency when leaders appear to not pick a side. In that case, it can be perceived as a leader being inactive, inert, or inept to making concrete decisions about which side s/he will fight with (and against). Concomitantly, the leader who chooses not to pick a side can be seen as taking action by not choosing a side. Put more simply, this frame can be read as action through inaction. In that case, the leader has taken on a road less traveled within the narrative of the

archetype associated with the war between the races in organizations. This leader is not adopting either/or; White/Black; or us/them thinking. Rather, this leader takes a much more individualized, complicated, both/and approach to making sense of the conditions with which s/he functions. That highlights a heightened sense of agency that is more complicated than many other framing devices offer.

*Difference is a Game*

The next metaphorical frame discussion in this dissertation study is the difference-as-game frame. Participants in this study tend to enact this frame as a means of increasing agency. Figure 1.4 displays the different levels of meaning according to the CMM model.

Archetype: One race must win the game by playing by the rules created for and by members of the dominant group.
Life Script: I am a player and the hopeful winner.
Contract: I am in a competition.
Episode(s): Score.
Speech Act: One up my competitor
Content: “team,” “strike,” “playing,” “games,” “set up”

**Figure 1.4 Difference is a Game CMM Analysis**

For participants, this frame encourages agency in that leaders are expected to learn the rules of the game. This rule can be associated with a particular industry, company, or department. What remains consistent is that the rules have been created for certain teams to win and certain teams to lose. Furthermore, the winners and losers are often pre-determined by issues of social status (e.g., race, class, gender, sexuality). Minority leaders must then learn the rules in order to play the game, which involves an increase in agency. They must become diligent in learning what it takes to compete as a minority leader in an organizational hierarchy, department, industry, and culture wherein they are on the losing team.

### *Difference-as-a-Performance*

Difference-as-performance is the final metaphorical frame that emerges in the data. How leaders enact this frame suggests that this frame also enhances agency. The examples culminate in the following explanation of the frame portrayed in Figure 1.5 through the lens of CMM's hierarchy of meaning.

<p>Archetype: An understanding that when any minority breaks through the proverbial glass ceiling, s/he must adopt a character that fits with the cultural narrative of the token (insert minority social group) leader.</p> <p>Life Script: I am a caricature of my "real self."</p> <p>Contract: Make the audience comfortable. Convince the audience.</p> <p>Episode(s): Become the character.</p> <p>Speech Act: Choose an appropriate role and play that role.</p> <p>Content: "mask," "limelight," separate," "wear," "two worlds"</p>
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**Figure 1.5 Difference is a Performance CMM Analysis**

Much like the difference-as-war and “I am Switzerland” approach, this frame complicates the notion of agency. This frame, too, can be read from various angles that lend themselves to varying degrees of agency. Some may read this frame as one that decreases agency because the power to determine the behaviors of minority leaders stems from members of the majority who write the scripts to the stories that minority leaders must then adopt the “appropriate” characters to perform.

However, when we look at how participants report enacting this frame, they do so to increase agency. That is an important distinction to make. Frames have the potential to be enacted in multiple ways. However, what matters is *how* individuals actually draw upon the frame to negotiate a given moment of tension. And, for the participants in this study, they enact the difference-as-performance frame as one that increases their agency in the workplace.

Participants describe being in the “limelight.” Kanter (1977) explains that this comes with the territory when a “token” breaks through the glass ceiling and enters into areas of the organization wherein they stand out, or are different. Some leaders manage the “limelight” by performing. They enact a character, albeit a fictional or cameo role, that fits with the narrative that “masks” all of what makes them uncomfortable different. They then highlight that which fits with the storyline. They perform. They have a sense of control of what they mask and what they take home. They control what is real and what is fake. They hide in plain sight, thus affording them the agency that seems to be stripped of them when the narrative calls for a different character.

### *Twice as Hard Catchphrase*

As this analysis acknowledges before, the surface of many frames within this dissertation may seem disheartening, particularly those that highlight conditions that involve perceptions and experiences that involve inequality and marginalization. However, the difference and leadership is “twice as hard” spin, according to participants increases participant’s sense of agency because it offers a way to overcome such marginalization – working harder. This point gets broken down further in Figure 1.6.

Archetype: Culturally, members of particular social groups (minorities) are systematically marginalized and subordinated in organizations.
Life Script: Members of marginalized subject positions must adopt an identity that includes being the harder, or hardest worker while managing the identity of a minority worker.
Contract: Me vs. Them; Subordinate vs. Superior; Minority vs. Majority
Episode(s): Minorities work twice as hard as their counterparts to “half as far.”
Content: “twice as hard,” “half as far,” “prove”

**Figure 1.6 Difference is Twice as Hard CMM Analysis**

The “twice as hard” spin offers minority leaders more than coping skills. This frame positions their marginalization as something that is salient and must be addressed. As such, the frame also offers a very specific way to address such conditions – again,

work harder. This allows participants to exercise agency and enact power, to some degree, in such conditions that other frames may not.

This may seem like an over-simplistic explanation of managing and maneuvering problematic, complicated conditions. However, it appears that, at least in this case, simplicity may be functionally useful for participants who are managing complex issues. The overall take-away message then is, “if you are marginalized and want to overcome such conditions, work harder.”

### *Religious Spin*

The final set of frames involve “spin,” or the practice of turning events in a way that re-position them in opposition to what is happening. The first spin frame that leaders draw upon is that of religion. Time and time again, participants defer to religion to make sense of negotiating difference and leadership. For participants, this frame increases agency. The elements of meaning are outlined below in Figure 1.7.

Archetype: An approach that positions God as the omnipotent power.
Life Script: I am God’s protected child.
Contract: Let God handle it.
Episode(s): Accept what happens in the moment, because God will have the final say.
Speech Act: Take the moral highroad.
Content: “God,” “foundation,” “control,” “wisdom,” “Christ is head,” “Black church,” “pray”

**Figure 1.7 Religious Spin CMM Analysis**

The “religion” frame increases agency specifically because leaders are connected to God. For leaders, God has the power, not members of the majority. God has the control. God has the power. God has the final say. Leaders then draw their agency from the power they gain by being connected to God.

### *Legacy Spin*

The final frame – difference is a part of a legacy – spins difference and leadership as a part of a pipeline started by trailblazers. As the content reveals, certain trailblazers are at the center of the legacy spin. Content and the additional layers of meaning are addressed in Figure 1.8.

Archetype: An understanding that minority leaders have the present opportunity because someone “came before them” and paved the way.

Life Script: I am a trail-keeper.

Contract: Prove to others that I deserve this opportunity.

Episode(s): Create/save a spot for the next minority.

Speech Act: Do not mess up.

Content: “gratification,” “Martin Luther King, Jr.,” “Malcom [X],” “Medgar [Evers],” “Fannie Lou Hamer,” “sacrificed,” “blaze the trail”

**Figure 1.8 Legacy Spin CMM Analysis**



Leaders who engage the legacy frame derive an increased sense of agency specifically from their life script, or identity. This level of meaning is particularly agentic in that it bridges important elements of meaning. The levels that become integral to increasing agency seem to be revealed in the content and how that connects to the archetype, with the life script serving as the bridge. Leaders consistently name minority leaders of the past who have “blazed the trail” for other minority leaders. That then connects to this archetype that leaders seem to adopt where they are not simply taking up a position of privilege because someone blazed the trail, but also as a means of keeping that trail open for the next generation. That explains how the life script gets labeled “trail keeper.” They are not blazing or creating the trail. They are keeping it open and alive for themselves and for the next minority leader. That then is where they derive their increased sense of responsibility, control, power, and agency.

### *Summary*

In this chapter, I identify five different framing devices deployed by practicing leaders as they make sense of and negotiate issues of difference and leadership in the workplace. My analysis suggests that participants frame difference in the context of leadership using three metaphorical frames: (1) difference-as-war, (2) difference-as-game, and (3) difference-as-performance. Some participants draw on one catchphrase, difference is “twice as hard” for minority leaders. Additionally, participants use spin to frame difference and leadership as difference gets spun in terms of religion or as part of a legacy.

As the CMM analysis reveals, each frame offers varying degrees of agency. The following frames tend to be associated within an increased sense of agency: (1) difference-as-war and I am prepared to fight; (2) difference-as-game; (3) difference-as-performance; (4) a religious spin; and (5) difference as legacy. The common theme that cuts across these different frames is the foregrounding of difference and the need to somehow find a way to overcome that difference. For example, the religious spin offers a higher power that will help someone who is different overcome. Interestingly, only one frame decreased agency – the difference-as-war frame and I am under attack approach, as this approach positioned the minority leader as a sitting duck waiting to be taken out by the majority. Finally, one frame has the potential to both increase and decrease a leader's sense of agency. The difference-as-war metaphor and I am Switzerland increases agency in that leaders exercise their ability to *choose* not to engage the war. However, by not engaging the war, they are not necessarily changing the conditions within which they function.

## CHAPTER IV

### EMERGING LEADERS ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I analyze the data generated from interviews with students at a mid-sized University in the Midwest. This data set is different from the data analyzed in Chapter 3 in that it focuses on the experiences, insights, and reflections of emerging leaders, or leaders who anticipate entering a leadership position in organizations once they begin their respective careers. A sample of emerging leaders was constructed from students who were enrolled (full-time or part-time) in classes at a mid-sized University in the Midwest and who did not hold a formal organizational leadership position outside of the context of the University. The inclusion criteria were designed to focus on individuals that had not obtained formal leadership positions in for-profit or nonprofit organizations, in order to capture how their perceptions of leadership and difference may vary from practicing leaders as a result of different socialization experiences.

#### **Emerging Leaders: Framing Themes**

Seven distinct frames regarding leadership and difference surfaced in the accounts of emerging leaders. The seven frames are: (1) difference as construction site; (2) difference as puzzle; (3) difference as shoving match; (4) difference as surprise; (5) “It is what it is” as a catchphrase for difference and leadership; (6) a religious spin on difference; and (7) a visibility spin on difference. A common theme that links a number of the frames centers on the notion of development and preparation. Many emerging minority leaders articulated frames that involved them actively grooming themselves for their future as practicing leaders. They are interested in developing their understandings,

identities, and approaches regarding difference and leadership so that they are prepared to be successful once they transition from emerging leader to practicing leader.

### *Metaphorical Frames*

Using the typology of framing devices presented by Fairhurst and Sarr (1996), I begin with the metaphorical frames employed by emerging leaders. Four distinct metaphors emerged: (a) difference as a puzzle, (b) difference as construction site, (c) difference as shoving match, and (d) difference as surprise.

#### **Difference-as-a-Construction Site**

The metaphor of construction site highlights how individuals have unique opportunities to play with what they will create and build as they develop their own understandings, approaches, and identities within the context of their futures as leaders of minority status. When leaders frame difference as a construction site, they suggest that there is an empty plot that awaits a builder and they will draw from their vision and available resources to create a suitable and sustainable structure that will prepare them for future leadership positions. Leaders as builders are responsible for creating a structure that will be timely, appropriate, and able to withstand the wear and tear they *foresee* in their career trajectories. The metaphor of difference as construction positions emerging leaders as both the site of what gets constructed and the builder.

Leaders who employ the construction site frame consistently discuss how important it is to establish a solid foundation because it supports the structure that gets built. Participant responses suggest that the frame involves multiple steps and various standards that influence how the final structure will be interpreted. This is consistent

with the more common practice of building a physical, inanimate structure, where a foundation is initially laid and a structure is designed and built upon it.

Participants who employed the construction frame described having control to varying degrees of what gets constructed. For example, some participants talked about the foundation coming from within one's self and grounded in one's personal history. When I asked Joshua to describe some of his expectations for his future as a minority leader, he responded with:

I think there will be a moment where I will have to do some soul searching and really draw back on my views and my childhood foundation, my religion. I will have to draw on those things for direction, because it would be a bad thing or you can go another route.

For Joshua, religion has and will continue to serve as his foundation for his life more generally, and future leadership more specifically. In those moments when leadership and his status as a minority create challenges and issues, he intends to rely on his religious foundation for support and trusts that his foundation will support and guide him in the right direction. His religious foundation will allow him to find “another route” to maneuver and negotiate issues of difference and leadership and steer clear of responding in way that will lead to a “bad thing.”

On the other hand, the organization may play an important part in helping the emerging leaders construct the foundation. For example, one participant talked about certain types of organizations, such as the military, heavily influence what gets

constructed. Below, he describes the role of de-constructing what once existed in order to re-build a structure suitable for his anticipated role in the military. Aaron says:

In the first phase, they break you down. They put you on such a low level and then, after that phase, you kind of lack self-confidence. In the next phase, they kind of build you up. You have more constructive criticism. They are teaching you how to be a leader, especially today.

In his experiences as a developing leader, Aaron anticipates going through a process of re-construction. Before he can be built up by the military, he must be first de-constructed. The plot of land must be cleared of any previous materials or waste that may circumvent the construction process. In this case, military officials are seeking uniformity. Each construction site is held to the same expectations regarding behavior. Aaron has little say in what will be de-constructed or constructed in its place. However, as he suggests later in his interview, because he identifies as a minority in the military, his structure will undoubtedly experience perceptions and social conditions differently than those who will live, work, and fight alongside him in the future.

The construction frame is also tied to the idea that structures are not built by individuals, they are built collectively by a collective of people working together. For example, Olivia highlight how the construction metaphor goes beyond the individual level arguing that emerging minority leaders – particularly those in college who are involved on campus and also working on constructing themselves into future leaders – should work together more to help support one another during this process. She is very

specific about various students leaders who are under construction could and should come together. She says they must come together to:

...help build each other up. Support each other. Say, for instance, we are having an event and we want to get the message out to everyone because we feel like the message is a big message especially for the minority students. Then, maybe we have...everybody else in the other organizations...reach out to their people and encourage people to come to this event.

She goes on to give some context that explains why she believes emerging minority leaders should “build each other up.”

In one of our past general body meetings, one person said, “There should be no reason why no Black person is a part of (names organization).” But, when we were recruiting people, people were saying, “We don’t like black people.” And I said, “Well, you’re black. How can you not like black people?” But, in a way, I can understand what they mean when it comes to different scenarios. Some people are just wild and out there. But, at the same time, our organization is positive. We do at least one community service event, one educational event, and one service event each month. It’s really positive. People don’t judge you. We just have fun. It shouldn’t be a reason that you shouldn’t want to join this organization.

Olivia is calling for support from similar construction workers. Specifically, she is calling on other minority construction workers to create a network wherein they offer further support to one other. Olivia suggests that the additional support is necessary

because minority leaders not only face backlash from members of the majority, but also from minority students – the very students for whom they create programs and activities. As a result, she suggests that once individuals have constructed their individual structures, they must band together to create a stronger foundation and stronger network to manage the conditions with which they face.

For the construction metaphor, the foundation and that which is constructed atop of it must be solid. The foundation must be strong enough to withstand the additional weight that comes with being negotiating one's roles as leaders and their minority status. Interestingly, the frame gets at a rather complex way of preparing for difference and leadership. This frame is complex because it involves multiple layers, steps, or phases. The evolution of the frame involves reaching back to one's past (e.g., family, experiences, religion) to connect to one's current experiences (e.g., military boot camp, training, class, campus organization meetings) and current practices (e.g., being broken down by the current/future industry, offering support to others in similar conditions). The practice of drawing from various areas of their lives and understandings and piecing together these parts, or resources, are what undergird the construction frame.

### **Difference-as-a-Puzzle**

Puzzles have clearly delineated pieces that fit into a particular spot in the overall picture. Each puzzle piece has a specific, limited place that it fits into one specific puzzle. In this instance, as emerging leaders enter organizations, they are being placed into an existing organizational puzzle, and they are cast as a puzzle piece. The difference as a puzzle metaphorical frame captures the notion of "fit" and emphasizes the



importance of preparing oneself to prove that although s/he identifies as a minority, s/he fits in the organizational puzzle. The challenge for emerging leaders is to be aware of how possible negative organizational and cultural stereotypes and how that might influence their ability to fit within the organizational puzzle.

Emerging leaders consistently referred to the notion of “fit” when constructing difference as a puzzle. Participants particularly worried that they would be viewed through negative social stereotypes that would disqualify from serving as leaders. In several cases, participants describe anticipated issues with difference and leadership as issues that addressed issues of whether or not existing negative social stereotypes would allow them to fit with organizational and cultural expectations for leadership. Their concern was that minorities who fit existing negative stereotypes would not fit with the organization’s expectations regarding leadership and how a minority member should act when serving as a leader.

Take for instance Ian, an upperclassmen and well-known student leader. He describes the racial consciousness that he manages as he navigates his undergraduate career saying:

Everyone has their eye on us. Even in high school. I could go back there. You know, when we look at the statistics, they say that one third of us will either be drugged out or in jail. I don’t fit with any of that. I’ve never done drugs, never been to jail, none of that.

Ebony also describes this “pressure” to fit into something.

In terms of those that have not, it would have to be societal pressure and the desire to “fit in” that have set me back as a leader because a true leader, I have learned, must be prepared to be bold and stand out.

These two quotes highlight two important aspects of “fit.” One aspect of “fit” centers on being placed within existing negative, stereotypical puzzles, and the participants attest to the difficulty of overcoming being forced into such puzzles. A second important aspect centers on the need to not simply “fit” but to excel if one is to succeed as a leader. This requires emerging minority leaders to take actions and show behaviors that allow them to stand out.

To resist being placed into negative stereotypes, emerging leaders must work actively to counter these negative expectations and perceptions. Danielle highlights this point clearly stating,

They might look at me as a Black woman. They might look at the stereotypes. She has an attitude. She is lazy. I’ll show them, I don’t have any attitude. I’m really nice. (Laughs). I get along with a lot of people. My work ethic is hard. Sometimes, I have a habit of taking on too much.

Ian and Danielle describe being aware of the “negative” stereotypes associated with African Americans. As these two participants suggest, these stereotypes position African Americans as the anti-thesis to what qualities and behaviors are acceptable for leaders in organizational contexts. To circumvent this issue, Ian and Danielle actively negotiate identities that run counter to African American stereotypes to prove they “fit” into the organizational puzzle. They seek to assure and re-assure future employers and

colleagues that they do not fit with the stereotypical African American puzzle. Instead, they fit better with other hard workers who have never been to jail.

This strategy is important because it seems that is unique to minority leaders. It is not unique that a potential leader must illustrate that s/he “fits” with a particular organization to gain entrance into that organization. However, it is the additional need to distance oneself from his/her race in order to *further* illustrate his/her fit. As Ian, Ebony, and Danielle suggest, they are unwilling to be forced into a puzzle comprised of pieces that are not suited for them, pieces that reflect pre-determined negative stereotypes. Instead, they would rather actively determine the shape and edges of their piece and create a new place in the organizational puzzle. They are engaged an approach whereby they are active in the puzzle making process.

### **Difference-as-a-Shoving Match**

The difference as a puzzle frame suggests that at some point emerging minority leaders create an organizational space that is accepting of them; one in which they fit. The difference as a shoving match frame is similar to the puzzle frame as it also speaks to the conditions that some emerging minority leaders face as they seek the proper “fit” with the organization as well as the difference as construction site frame as they build their foundation and structure. However, the difference-as-shoving-match frame emphasizes to a greater degree the *how* of building a foundation or working the puzzle versus *what* is being built. Emerging leaders typically discuss moments where they have faced some sort of adversary, much like practicing leaders experience when they feel at war with their colleagues, organization, or society. Similar to the practicing leaders, the

emerging leaders who engage this frame attribute the pushback to a variety of sources. However, it is the idea that something is pushing against them – and thus, mitigating their efforts to lead – largely because of their social *difference* that characterizes this frame.

Take for instance Danielle, who summarizes her overarching goal as an emerging minority leader. She says, “I just want to fight the stereotypes. Not everyone is like that. It’s not right to shove a stereotype on me. I won’t shove a negative stereotype on you.” Here she suggests that there is a tendency to have stereotypes “shoved” or pushed onto her. She highlights a heightened level of consciousness, because as she explains, “it’s not right.” This suggests that our interview is not the first chance she has had to reconcile such events. In turn, she has developed the “shoving match” frame to make sense of stereotypes that are pushed onto her.

Marie also describes moments wherein she must push against others’ attempts to cubbyhole her racial identity into one category or another. When asked how she plans to manage difference in the future and how she identifies, she cuts me off by stating, “I identify with it all! And, people get really mad at me for it.” I followed by asking her to “Tell me more.” She shared the following:

Because, they’re like, “What do you mean, you’re both?” “What do you mean? I’m both. My mom’s White. My dad’s Black. Put ‘em together, you got me. I’m White and bright, but I’m dark and beautiful. I don’t know. I’m a combination.” Like I tell people all the time – they’re like, “so, what are you?” I’m like, “I’m

mixed.” Well, are you Black are you White. I’m mixed. Congratulations. I’m two different races. How about yourself?

One could read her comments as difference-as-a-surprise as others seem baffled by Marie’s conscious choice to identify with two groups at once (Black and White) or one category that condenses them both (mixed). In either case, it is not the surprise of others that makes her experiences significant. It is the verbal push back she uses to claim her space in category that others’ perceptions do not afford her. The push back she offers then becomes the more salient move she makes under such conditions.

Alfred also describes some of the stereotypes he faced in terms of not being expected to “speak properly” or being regarded as an “Oreo” when he did. He enacts the difference-as-a shoving match in moments wherein, as a leader on campus who is the first African American student to hold this position, he pushes against stereotypes. He recalls one particular moment wherein the frame became useful.

I had a friend – here roommate had never seen an African American in person. In person! You’re nineteen years old and you’ve never seen an African American in person? Never in her life. All she saw was TV. I can’t blame her. So, when we walked in, she saw a ghost. We’re like, “Calm down; we’re not going to take anything.” Experiencing things like that reminds me that things like this really go on.

Again, Alfred’s recollections could be categorized as difference-as-surprise because he was clearly thrown off by the realization that this young person had never “seen an African American in person.” However, the surprise was brief as he quickly began

processing the moment in a way that did not “blame her.” Instead, in order to manage the situation, he enacted a difference-as-shoving match as he pushed against the stereotype or perception that because he is African American, he may cause harm to her. This move then allows him to take control over a situation that was initially shaped by stereotypical notions of African Americans.

Participants who identify as emerging leaders sometimes describe leadership and difference as two forces that connect to create conditions with which they experience or expect to experience forces that will push them around. To some degree, emerging minority leaders seem to be pushed toward identities and expectations, typically in the form of negative social stereotypes, that box them in and limit the identity positions that they can subsequently take up. These boxes and limitations tend to foreground the negative social stereotypes associated with their perceived race and/or ethnicity, which work against their fitting into dominant or heteronormative images of leadership. Given that emerging minority leaders are concurrently being pushed and pushing against such forces, they have to exert additional effort to make progress away from the positions they do not wish to take up, while also pushing toward the identities, understandings, and conditions they hope to experience.

### **Difference-as-a-Surprise**

The difference as a surprise frame is interesting because it is somewhat paradoxical as emerging minority leaders must prepare for instances where difference and leadership become salient, but are not certain when these instances may occur, where, and with whom. They are not oblivious to the potentiality of facing issues that

foreground difference. Yet, they find themselves anticipating for and preparing for situations before they enter into organizational contexts and their leadership careers to be build their capacity for managing surprises. Even though they prepare for managing difference, they are still taken aback by when, how, and with whom difference emerges. Below, I describe various accounts regarding describe how participants make sense of the surprises they have encountered and manage them. It is important to note, when reading the examples below, “being surprised” is one way to generally categorize their experiences. As each participant illustrates, the surprise often includes a number of internal and external issues that they must manage simultaneously. While they may internalize the surprise, they must manage that surprise in how they respond to the situation. They must manage their emotions in ways that do not offend those involved. They must manage their emotions in ways that do not play into stereotypes that link anger and race. They must then eloquently speak on behalf of themselves, while serving as a representative for their race. It is about learning to manage such situations while also being responsible for the learning of others. These complicated, intersecting moves reveal the various facets that are associated with the “surprise” frame.

Undoubtedly, a classroom at a PWI (predominantly white institution) is one setting where emerging leaders cut their teeth on managing conditions wherein they are members of the minority working alongside a greater number of members of the majority. Danielle is particularly surprised by some of the questions her fellow classmates have asked her during class meetings. Once she made this point, I asked for greater detail. She responded with,

...some of them were funny, but also interesting. One was, “As African Americans, do you really have to spend that much to get your hair done?” And, that’s the only one that sticks out in my mind. But, that experience was just WOW (*emphasis in speech*) and overwhelming, you know? It turned out pretty good.

Danielle offers the two categories of “funny” and “interesting” for understanding the different surprising instances in which she is called on to speak on behalf of her race and appreciates its complexity. While being in the anticipatory socialization phase, she is preparing herself for leadership in the future. While doing so, she is being asked to explain how long it takes to get her hair done. Moreover, she is being asked to confirm how long it takes for other African American women to get their hair done. This takes her aback and surprises her. She is thrown off and left with one word, “Wow.” It seems then that this instance falls into the latter category “interesting.” Furthermore, she describes the incident as overwhelming. It makes sense that in a classroom setting it can be overwhelming to speak on behalf of one’s entire race, particularly about an issue as seemingly trivial as hair care. However, to be put on the spot to answer such question, while attending class might seem overwhelming to an emerging leader. What further makes Danielle’s account complex is that she points out how surprised, interested, and somewhat overwhelmed (when she says, “Wow!”) she feels to speak on behalf of her race or to be put on the spot about a topic that is likely not a subject covered in the class material.



Interestingly, she downplays the event as “good.” This move seems to comfort the person asking the question more so than Danielle. Danielle seems to be conflicted. It appears that she has learned that she cannot show that she is somewhat conflicted when she is surprised. She was overwhelmed, but everything is okay, because it “turned out pretty good.” Without more information, it is difficult to determine if the “it turnout pretty good” comment is more for the participant, the interviewer, or her classmates. In any case, it is important to highlight this comment because it explains how she is learning to make sense of and respond in moments wherein she is surprised when issues of difference become salient, particularly those that involve her taking a token position and speaking on behalf of her race regarding stereotypes.

Joshua also experienced a rather complicated situation when working in a summer program with predominately White individuals. Below, he reflects on the “one particular incident that comes to mind.”

There was a kid who wore a belt buckle with the emblem of the confederate flag. It was interesting for me because that was the first time I saw a kid openly... A couple of the African American kids approached me and asked, “Man do you see this? Check this out. What do you think about this? You’re not going to do anything about it?” Being partly thrown off myself by the fact that he was willing to wear that in the workplace, I thought “Which way should I go at him?” Should I admonish his decisions? Or, should we have a discussion about it. I chose the latter. I let him know why it would be offensive, or controversial to wear that in

the workplace. I didn't want to intimidate him or make him feel isolated – which he was doing to himself, but I didn't want to further that.

When I asked how the conversation unfolded, he replied:

Oh, it went well. I believe because he had respect for me. In some ways, I believe that kid had some prejudices and was in an environment back at home that was the norm – to be prejudice, particularly to black people. But, I think I was different to him by being in a leadership role and handling things the way that I did. I think he found me to be a respectable leader.

In this event, Joshua experienced surprise in many ways. He was surprised to encounter someone he was managing donning a symbol that is associated with deep-rooted, historical racial tensions (among other things). He was further surprised because other workers noticed the symbol and called on Joshua to handle things immediately. This surprise placed Joshua in a situation that, given his account, he had not prepared for or expected. However, as the leader, he rose to the task and spoke to the young man wearing the Confederate flag belt buckle. It was during this dialogue that Joshua was surprised to find that the young man received the message about the belt buckle as he had.

This incident is one that could easily take anyone, regardless of race, gender, class, age, etc., by surprise. However, as an emerging *minority* leader, Joshua had to both reign in his feelings as someone whose history places him on the losing end of the symbolism and someone who wants to move beyond that to create and sustain a work environment that does not foreground the symbol itself. This sort of work, again, hones a

skillset for emerging minority leaders that involves additional work. This work seemed to be a surprise for Joshua in this moment; a pleasant surprise in the end, but a surprise nonetheless.

Unfortunately, JoAnn was not met with a pleasant surprise. Instead, she found that while she had been prepared for surprises at the initial cross-section of difference and leadership, she was not prepared for the subsequent surprises. This then led to less a less than pleasant experience. JoAnn says,

I am a [student] leader. It was very hard to get that position. Out of the 50 or so applications, there were only four African Americans, and no other races. It wasn't an easy process. Once I got it, I thought, "I like this job." I wanted to move up in it. I was working hard, but I didn't move up. There is an office here and if you work in this office, you are a bit more privileged. I don't work in that office. The students there seem to be more privileged because they worked in the office and the boss got to see their skills. It was hard. It was difficult.

JoAnn does not seem surprised that few African Americans applied for this position. It seems that she is not surprised that no other racial minorities are represented in the application pool. Additionally, she does not seem surprised that she was chosen for the position. JoAnn is surprised when her hard work does not pay off with a promotion. This surprise sparks a different way of making sense of the process for JoAnn. While race gets foreground during the interview process (the process wherein she was prepared for particular surprises, such as racial underrepresentation), race takes a background when she is actually surprised. The surprise she experiences then backgrounds race and

foregrounds issues of proximity. The student leaders in the front office, closest to the boss, move up and experience that privilege. One could read this to suggest that JoAnn intended to use surprise to her benefit by being a hard working minority, but this was circumvented by the lack of proximity to the decision makers. As a result, she was surprised by her inability to fully prepare for the additional factors.

The surprise frame allows participants to enact an identity that – in one moment – is predominantly defined by their minority status. They realize this may mean they are serving as a representative for the race and themselves. They must also be aware of the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of those around them. It becomes their (the minority emerging leader) responsibility to bridge these meaning-making processes together in a succinct way that addresses issues of difference, individual identities, cultural narratives, and group dynamics. Undoubtedly, this framing device involves complicated processes that culminate in, and/or are created by, surprises that have emerging in participants' experiences. More importantly, whether this surprise begins as a possible negative incident, it seems extremely important to participants that it ends on a positive note for all.

### *Jargon and Catchphrases*

#### **“It is what it is”**

In this next section of the analysis, I address how participants use the catchphrase, “It is what it is,” a phrase that has found traction in our current culture. On multiple occasions participants framed their experience with leadership and difference as follows, “It is what it is.” This frame became a catchall for explaining how difference

and leadership has shaped and will shape their experiences of difference in organizational contexts. The frame implies that the inequalities that are threaded in the very fabric of many organizational practices in the United States will not change. The catchphrase gets used as a means of saying inequality exists and it is normal. It always has been. It always will be. Furthermore, minority leaders must accept this “fact” and get back to work.

For example, Linda talks about some of her experiences in the classroom. She focuses on one class discussion that center around issues of race, and reflects on how she makes sense of the dialogue. Linda states that

[W]e just had a discussion in class about whiteness...We were all mixed and from all over the place, and I was like, “White people do have the power, and that’s okay. That’s not a bad thing. It is what it is. It’s been that way so long that it is what it is.”

For Linda, Whites have always had the power. This fact has not changed over time, and one could infer that, for Linda, things will not change in the foreseeable future. What this frame then offers Linda is a springboard for moving forward. She is not interested in debating whether or not inequality and White power in terms of “good versus bad.” Instead, she is interested in accepting the dynamics for what they are and have been. Whites have had the power. Whites currently have the power. Whites will keep the power. It is what it is.

While James does not necessarily say “It is what it is” to frame his perceptions about difference, specifically race, and leadership, he gets at the notion that undeniable,

irrefutable, static conditions exist for minorities seeking or practicing leadership. He states:

Well, there's the common stereotype that if you put an African American in a high-level leadership position; he messes up. Well, of course, it's just kind of – it's just a common stereotype that African-Americans can't lead which was socialized by many generations before us. Even the President is getting flack because, "oh, he's doing so bad(ly) because he's an African-American.

James, like Linda, gets at the idea that certain ideas about difference and leadership have been around so long that they become "common." They simply exist. This idea that an African American cannot lead is a given. It has been around so long that we have become "socialized" to accept it as true, often without question. It simply is what it is.

James goes on to offer further conditions and expectations that seem to come with the territory of serving as a minority leader:

Well, right now, you have to work extremely hard. You definitely have to – right now – separate yourself from your White colleague just because you are of a different color. All the stereotypes and all of the things have been socialized from many generations before. You have to work extremely hard. You have to – not saying completely assimilate...but, in a sense, you have to. There's the research about people not getting hired because of their name or the way they speak and things of that nature. We just have to be aware of it. You have to definitely apply to the electorate to either get a job or to lead over [others].

Here, James elaborates the idea that certain work conditions exist that racial and ethnic minorities must understand and negotiate. They must understand that they will not only have to work hard, but “extremely hard” at convincing the “electorate,” or the majority that they belong, can do the work, and are willing to work harder when/if their difference becomes an issue.

In this section of James’ interview, he also offers some insight into how the frame “It is what it is” gains traction in the framing devices deployed by fellow participants – previous generations. He suggests that each previous generation has played some role in reifying the stereotypes that have become “normal” or “standard.” As each generation passes down ideas that African Americans are not suited to lead or Whites (should) have a monopoly on power, those ideas become true. They become fact. Such conditions become real. As a result, current and future generations, as James and Linda suggest, are left framing those truths with the “It is what it is” frame.

Olivia furthers James’ use of the frame by foreshadowing her experiences with difference and leadership. When asked about her future, she says, “I am going to face a lot of challenges and obstacles...” She continues with:

...especially as a minority. When [I] get out into the real world, if  
I want a real good job, a lot of times they are going to give it to  
Caucasian men; then, it’s Caucasian women; then, minority men;  
then, minority women.

Olivia has already accepted that she will be among the last chosen for a job because she identifies as a woman and a minority. She does not challenge this thinking; rather she

accepts it as normal. She accepts that “It is what it is.” These are simply the rules. These are regular hiring practices and she is at the end of the line.

Collectively, these three participants speak to the same catchphrase: “It is what it is.” Although all do not use the catchphrase verbatim, each participant above speaks to the spirit of the frame. “It is what it is” foregrounds a notion that the conditions within which minority leaders practice involves conditions that they cannot control or change. Most importantly, they cannot change the fact that they take up a minority position. This frame allows users to then accept, even embrace their minority status and move on without being discouraged or overtaken by inequality.

### *Spin*

Spin allows leaders to frame their experiences in ways that offer an alternative vantage point to a situation. Put another way, spin allows leaders to change the way with which they understand and make sense of events. When reviewing the responses of practicing leaders, two frames emerge as useful ways of spinning issues of difference and leadership: (1) a religious spin; and a (2) visibility spin. I begin with examples of the religious spin framing device.

#### **Religious Spin**

The spinning of difference and leadership as connected to religion, or one’s faith, takes on a number of purposes for participants. For some, religion offers coping mechanisms, such as prayer. For others, religion is a source of confidence and reassurance that they can lead although society may suggest that minorities should not be



leaders. There are a host of additional resources a religious spin to difference offers participants.

One question that was asked in almost every interview was some variation of, “If difference and leadership becomes an issue for you in the future, how do you plan to address it?” In one brief statement, Tyler quickly explains his stance. He says, “...faith is always something that I draw from as just being a guideline, or blueprint for how I carry myself on a day-to-day basis.” Without going into any particular detail, Tyler frames his planned approach for dealing with future issues of difference and leadership. His faith is his blueprint. Thus, he plans to follow the plans laid out by his faith to address any and every issue that comes his way, including issues of difference and leadership.

Of all the participants, Ian was the most animated when using religion to spin his understanding of difference and leadership. He says,

...my number one thing (as he pounds his fist into his hands), keep God first.

That’s how I live. That’s how I move. That’s how I breathe. That’s where I get my strength. Nothing I do goes without consulting Him first. That’s just me. This is just my opinion - God first.

For Ian, God serves as his consultant. God also gives him what he needs to live. God also provides direction, and serves as source of strength. God is at the center of all he does. Again, this is consistent with many of the comments that are shared by practicing leaders. They consistently draw on religion, namely God or some higher power that helps them negotiate difference and leadership.

This theme gets reflected further in the interview when he specifically addresses the role of God, difference, and what he anticipates for the future.

You know that I'm Black the moment you see me. Now if you feel a certain way about the color of my skin, that's your own fault. I'm just going to do what I'm supposed to do, definitely pray for the person [and] show love, because the only way you can kill something like that is with love... You will get to see that I don't hold a grudge in my heart against anybody. I don't get to know you because you fit into a bracket; I get to know you because of who you are.

As Ian suggests here, God – the core of the religious frame – allows Ian to move beyond difference in a number of ways. First, the frame offers a strategy for dealing with issues of difference that may arise – prayer. The frame also offers Ian an appropriate way of behaving in response to any issues that may arise – expressions of love and forgiveness. The frame even offers Ian a way of thinking about others in un-racialized ways as he moves beyond placing people into racialized brackets. Instead, because of his religion and his God, he is able to look beyond race and get to know people for “what [they] are.”

Ebony is also very straightforward about what how religion influences how she leads. She says, “My spiritual connection and faith in God has been a major factor in what has given me confidence and passion to lead.” For Ebony, the religion frame offers the confidence boost necessary for leading, especially as an emerging minority leader. Additionally, the frame offers a heightened desire to do this sort of work. Without religion as a means for spinning what she might face as a minority leader, she would not

have the confidence or passion to do the job. Thus, the frame is inconsequential to her future as a practicing leader.

The religion spin is unique to many other frames presented in this analysis because of the degree to which it permeates so many facets of participant's lives. As the examples above illustrate, religion is not something that is limited to a participant's future career. The religion spin frame informs all aspects of their lives. It is as omnipotent as the God to which many speak of. It seems then that this frame may be one of the more enduring frames deployed by participants.

### **Visibility Spin**

The visibility spin is interesting as it engages a body of literature developed to explain the influx of women (minorities) into management (leadership) positions in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century – tokenism (Kanter, 1977). According to Kanter, women managers often experienced a sense of heightened visibility in which they stood out among their peers, not because of their work ethic or know-how, but because they were different and novel.

For some participants in this study, they find themselves embracing this increased sense of visibility. They seek out opportunities to become and remain visible. This speaks to a heightened sense of consciousness whereby they understand that they are among the minority on campus. Rather than shy away from this, they embrace and to some degree capitalize on this notion to further stand out and be noticed, or be visible.

It is important to point out that being visible takes work. Being visible simply because one is different is but the tip of the iceberg. Sara gets at this when she describes

her experiences on campus. She speaks specifically about competing against, and often losing to, White students for prestigious and highly competitive student positions on campus. Sara explains the tensions she has faced as an emerging minority leader at a PWI (predominantly White institution). She says,

...I don't let it stop me, because I really want to be known. I really want to have a certain position, well not a certain position, I just really want to be known. So, I will just keep working hard. Hopefully, in time, I will get what I want.

She understands she is different and that is something that can possibly “stop” her, but visibility vis-à-vis difference is not enough for Sara. She can be visible simply because she is African American. However, this is not enough for her. She also wants a position that will allow her to be visible and different. Until this possible, she will continue to work hard to this aim. The visibility frame then offers her a direction to work toward fulfilling her goal of being “known.”

Danielle engages this frame because she is both interested in being visible on campus as an individual and also providing visibility for other minority students. Below, she discusses how she approaches leadership in one of the organizations she is affiliated with on campus. She says,

Look, this organization isn't just for me. This is for everybody. If you have any inputs that you want to bring on campus, that's different, just let me know. We can vote on it and we can try to bring it to life...I gave them an example, about how one student here owns her own clothing line. I wasn't a part of the (executive board), but we helped her bring her fashion show to campus. So, I

asked them, “What do you want to do?” My main goal is to make a statement on campus. And bring empowerment and unity with minority students. It’s kind of hard...

Again, like the previous two participants report, Danielle is not as concerned with ranking in the organization. She was clear that while she was interested in leading by offering them what they want, she was not concerned with the fact that she was not a part of the executive board. She was more interested in providing the minority entrepreneur with a platform to become more visible on campus.

Ebony is a bit more direct about the source of what pushes her. She says, I have used my minority status as a means to motivate me even...being that it makes me stand out. I have worked towards taking advantage of opportunities offered solely for the advantage of minorities. It has also been a driving factor in my passion to reach out to other minorities that are struggling to succeed.

Ebony directly acknowledges that being different makes her “stand out.” However, she also acknowledges that she has strategically used this to help her “take advantage of opportunities” that are designed to help advance other minorities. Put another way, she has used her visibility as a springboard to help others. This frame then serves as the motivating, “driving” force by which she engages leadership and difference in her current role as an emerging minority leader.

Lastly, Eugene speaks about being visible while he is currently on campus as well as desire to be visible event after he leaves the University. He proudly proclaims that he is the first African American to hold a specific role on campus. When asked what

that feels like, he responds, “That was something major for me because I said when I come to this University...I want to leave my mark wherever I go. I see this as a first mark to many more marks that I will leave here.” Eugene is not concerned with merely being visible during his tenure at the University. Instead, he seeks opportunities that will sustain his visibility beyond that tenure. After all, being the first is a mark, a level of visibility that cannot be erased.

The visibility frame becomes useful for emerging leaders who understand that they stand out because of their difference. However, they are not interested in standing out simply because of race. They want to stand out because of race and something else. They want to stand out because of difference and leadership. They want to “leave a mark,” one that cannot be erased by time. They want to be the first to hold titles. They want to create sustainable organizations and relationships. They *want* to be visible, rather than blend in or hide out, because of the opportunities that emerge at the intersection of difference and leadership.

### **Emerging Leaders: CMM Analysis**

Similar to Chapter 3, the second portion of this chapter addresses research question two, which focuses on the relationship between each frame and agency. CMM theory is used to unpack the interdependent, hierarchical levels of meaning (Bruss, et al., 2005; Orbe & Camara, 2010) which combine to increase, decrease, or neutralize the agency emerging leaders perceive they can exercise.

### *Difference is a Construction Site*

The difference-as-construction site metaphorical frame allows participants to create, develop, and mold themselves into structures that will be suitable and sustainable for the future. The frame allows participants to foreground their roles as architects and construction workers. It is important to note that what they build is likely informed by the type of organization or industry for which they are preparing (for example, the military). However, the frame places a large amount of responsibility on the shoulders of participants. This suggests that the difference-as-construction frame increases agency. In Figure 2.1, I unpack the levels of meaning that further illustrate how agency emerges within this frame.

Archetype: An approach to leadership whereby leaders are made, not born.
Life script: An identity as an architect, builder, and/or structure
Contract: An understanding that one is constantly being de- or re-constructed by oneself, his/her company, or his/her industry.
Content: “build,” “construct,” “fix,” “foundation”

**Figure 2.1 Difference is a Construction Site CMM Analysis**

The difference-as-construction site foregrounds the role of emerging minority leaders to construct, to develop, or to build. It then becomes their choice and their responsibility to take the initiative to build what is necessary for their desired career

path. It becomes their responsibility to create a structure, a self which can withstand the day-to-day wear and tear that will likely come after they transition into the role of a practicing minority leader.

### **Difference is a Puzzle**

Similar to the difference-as-a-construction site frame, the difference-as-a-puzzle frame presents a nuanced sense of agency, which ultimately lends itself to a heightened sense of agency for the emerging minority leader. The frame is nuanced because in terms of the puzzle as a whole, the emerging minority leader has little to no control of overall organizational puzzle. The emerging leader does not get to define or shape the organizational puzzle. The puzzle will be pre-determined, or shaped before the emerging leaders seek an appropriate “fit.”

However, part of achieving that “fit” with the organization requires the emerging leader make choices of how to stand out and counteract negative social stereotypes. As emerging minority leaders shapes and re-shapes themselves so that they will fit some puzzle in the future, they exercise agency. They get to decide which edges will be flat versus those that will become round. They shape their communicative behaviors, identity, leadership approaches, and so on. Below, I offer a CMM model that highlights various levels of meaning at the center of the puzzle frame. In Figure 2.2, I unpack the levels of meaning that become salient when leaders enact the puzzle metaphorical frame. Figure 2.2 can be found on the next page, respectively.



Archetype: An understanding of difference and leadership as a large puzzle made up of many different pieces.

Culture: The American Dream that posits that hard work will pay off for everyone; thus, everyone who works hard will find a puzzle wherein they fit.

Script: I am a unique piece that does not fit within a stereotypical puzzle, but a professional, organizational puzzle.

Relationship: Pieces (workers) are required to communicate in ways that sustain the fit.

Contract: Pieces (workers) are required to fit together or find a different puzzle.

Content: “fit,” “fight together,” “puzzle”

**Figure 2.2 Difference is a Puzzle CMM Analysis**

Interestingly, participants draw their sense of agency from this frame centers around the script, or identity. All pieces of a puzzle must fit together in order for that puzzle to be complete. However, participants in this study suggest that they do not want to fit into a stereotypical puzzle that is prescribed to them. They would rather stand out in ways that do not fit with the stereotypical puzzles so as to emphasize their fit into a more professional, organizational puzzle. Thus, their identity work as a piece of an organizational puzzle, not a stereotypical puzzle becomes the highlight of this frame and the source of their increased agency. This is similar to Fairhurst’s (2007) notion of reflexive agency of where leaders are aware of the existing constraints they must manage and make choices regarding how to manage them.

## **Difference is a Shoving Match**

The shoving match frame mirrors many other frames emerging in the analysis. Many participants describe moments wherein they feel as if there is an “us” versus “them,” me versus you, or Black versus White battle or struggle. The notion of opposition remains consistent within this frame, though the source of the tension or opposition may vary. What also remains consistent is the degree of agency afforded by this frame. Before delving into how agency gets negotiated within this frame, I offer a brief summary of different salient levels of meaning in Figure 2.3.

Archetype: Because I am a minority, there will be opposing forces that seek to prevent me from leading.

Life script: I am a minority.

Contract: An expectation of pushback from those who do not look like you.

Content: “push,” “pushback,” “fight,” “shoved”

**Figure 2.3 Difference is a Shoving Match CMM Analysis**

If we focus on the content of the messages used as leaders engage this frame, there is clearly some level of opposition between separate forces. Some leaders describe this as an opposition between members of the minority and majority populations. Others describe this as an internal battle to make sense of society pressures and ascriptions. However, it is important to note that emerging leaders engage the opposition, the shoving between forces with a heightened sense of agency. This frame allows them to do

so. They are pushing back. They are not being pushed around and instead fight back. They are unwilling to simply be shoved around because they identify as a minority. The frame encourages a heightened degree of agency.

### **Difference is a Surprise**

Surprise is a particularly interesting frame, in terms of agency, in that it offers a multi-faceted view of agency. On the one hand, leaders have no plausible way of controlling the surprise beyond being open to the notion that it may occur at some point. They will not know with whom, when, where, or what they may engage with challenges due to leadership and difference. However, they do why they will inevitably be surprised – because difference and leadership often generates unexpected complications in organizational settings. Figure 3.4 lays out the meaning levels associated with this frame

Archetype: An understanding that minority leaders can never fully know how or when their minority status will become a salient issue.

Life script: I am a minority who will be surprised or surprise others.

Contract: Expect the unexpected from members of the majority.

Content: “interesting,” “wow,” “overwhelming”

**Figure 2.4 Difference is a Surprise CMM Analysis**

The difference-as-a-surprise frame is complicated in that it involves preparing for an encounter for which participants have no concrete information prior to its occurrence.

Emerging leaders do not know when this encounter will occur. They do not know under what conditions it may or may not occur. Moreover, they do not know who will be involved in the surprise. Yet, they know that they must prepare for an inevitable where difference and leadership become an issue. As a result, this makes the contract level of meaning particularly important because emerging minority leaders can expect that at some point, they will surprise or will be surprised when interacting with colleagues, employees, or customers of the majority. This creates an interesting dynamic because leaders must get prepared for a surprise – something that, by its very nature offers little, if any, warning.

**“It is what it is”**

This frame undermines and decreases the agency of minority leaders as it treats the conditions of difference and leadership as “normal.” Participants who draw on this catchphrase suggest that the differences between minorities and members of the majority have existed, currently exist, and will continue to exist. They are not deploying a frame here that will change such conditions. Instead, they deploy a frame that acknowledges and accepts such conditions. Rather than highlight the details of the conditions (majority vs. minority dynamics) and in turn give power to the conditions (i.e., the power to marginalize), they are enacting a frame that undermines those conditions. This re-orientation of such conditions provides the participants with a heightened sense of agency. The levels of meaning associated with the “It is what it is” catchphrase are addressed in Figure 2.5. Figure 2.5 can be found on the next page.

Archetype: An acceptance of the inequalities between Whites and minorities in the United States as normal.

Life script: An identity as a minority leader, and someone who is unequal to – by societal standards – to his/her White colleagues.

Contracts: Whites will maintain power and minorities will adapt accordingly.

Content: “It is what it is,” “power,” “Whites”

**Figure 2.5 “It is what it is” CMM Analysis**

The “It is what it is” frame significantly decreases agency because those who engage the frame foreground the archetype that inequality in the U.S. workplace is inevitable, irrefutable, and unchanging. This archetype then informs the lower levels of meaning. When participants accept the archetype, they then adopt a life script wherein they are at the bottom of a social hierarchy because they are different. Given their position in the bottom rungs of society, they are less likely to access and exercise agency as agency becomes the prerogative of those in power. As a result, those in power sustain their monopoly of power, control, and agency because the emerging minority leader accepts the relationship contract wherein the minority leader must accept a subordinate position. Minority leaders within the difference, “It is what it is” frame lose agency once

they accept the archetype that Whites will always have the power over members of minority groups.

### **Religion Spin**

Participants who engage this frame highlight the role of higher power as they work the challenges created by leadership and difference. This higher power is responsible for guiding them in the “right” direction when faced with issues of difference and leadership. Furthermore, the higher power presents the emerging leader with the power they need to manage their day-to-day actions as an emerging minority leader. Key meaning-making elements of the frame are captured in the figure below.

Archetype: An understanding that minority leaders must draw on religion or faith to manage any issues that emerge at the intersection of difference and leadership.

Life script: Identification as a child of God.

Contracts: God will guide me in the right direction.

Content: “God,” “religion,” “faith”

**Figure 2.6 Religious Spin CMM Analysis**

This model of meaning making highlights an increased sense of agency for leaders who draw on religion to frame their experiences and expectations. They are agentic because they have an active, special relationship with a power that is more powerful than their White colleagues. Their religion, faith, and/or God can offer than any individual or institution can in terms of overcoming an obstacle or coping with

problematic conditions. As a result, leaders who engage this frame draw on a higher power that offers them a greater sense of agency when addressing issues that may emerge at the intersection of difference and leadership.

### **Visibility Spin**

Visibility emerges in a number of interviews. Participants consistently credit their leadership status with being well known and highly visible on campus. Although a number of participants acknowledge that their leadership status does not necessarily stem from a particular title or ranking in an on-campus organization, they are confident that they are leaders because of the degree to which they are visible to students, faculty, staff, and administrators. The levels of meaning that become salient within this frame are highlighted below.

Archetype: An understanding that emerging leaders must stand out in order to be respected as leaders.
Life script: An identity as a well-known standout in a given context.
Contract: Minority leaders will serve as representatives and spokespeople for their social group in ways that reassure their White colleagues.
Content: “mark,” “visible,” “known”

**Figure 2.7 Visibility Spin CMM Analysis**

The visibility frame is associated with increased perceptions of agency. Participants who engage this frame must become active in the process of become visible. They must attend numerous events. They must shake hands. They must attend and be active participants in class. To be visible, they must act. Thus, the frame highly

encourages agency and heightens the amount of control one has on how they manage become leaders.

### *Summary*

When reviewing the data stemming from the twenty-one interviews with University students, seven distinct frames emerged. The frames are: (1) difference-as-a-puzzle; (2) difference-as-a-construction site; (3) difference-as-a-shoving match; (4) difference-as-a-surprise; (5) the catchphrase that difference, “It is what it is;” (6) a religious spin on difference; and (7) a visibility spin on difference. In this chapter, each frame is unpacked using the detailed accounts and insights of participants. In the second half of the chapter, the complexities of each frame are highlighted through the lens CMM’s hierarchy of meaning.

First, an important theme that emerges from the frames and meanings revealed in this chapter reflect the point within the socialization process these participants function within. Again, these participants are in the anticipatory organizational socialization phase. They are preparing themselves for future leadership opportunities. It makes sense then that a common theme across the framing devices is one that speaks to possibility. These emerging leaders are looking to the future, and as a result, many of their frames discuss the potentialities of their future. Take for instance the difference-as-construction-site frame. This frame centers on building and creating. The frame centers around the notion about what is possible – about what they can possible create as they prepare to enter into the workforce and attain a leadership role.



Interestingly, and somewhat in contrast to the first theme, emerging leaders seem either less hopeful with changing the social conditions within which they may work or more pragmatic about what is possible. They are not interested in changing the dynamics that sustain unequal practices between members of the majority and members of minority statuses. Rather, they are more interested in framing, communicating, and behaving in ways that will adapt to such conditions. Put another way, they take on a rather individualistic approach to negotiating issues of difference and leadership. No frame highlights this point better than the “It is what it is” catchphrase. For emerging leaders, this frame allows them to acknowledge that their difference will likely create certain issues; however, they are prepared (or preparing) to negotiate this irrefutable fact.

For emerging leaders, difference and leadership is something that they are preparing for each and every day and the college campus is their practicing ground. They understand the difference can create issues in the workplace; but they are prepared to deploy the frames necessary for making sense of and negotiating such conditions.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

This dissertation addresses the links between two key concepts in the meaning-making processes of emerging and practicing minority leaders, the relationship between the frames individual leaders use to engage difference and their sense of agency.

Referring to Potter and Wetherell's (1987) concept of "interpretative repertoire,"

Fairhurst (2005) articulates the relationship between framing and agency as follows:

...such tool bags (interpretative repertoires) are ready for use by leadership actors who, in the moment of communicating, are managers of meaning and passive receptors of meaning all at once (Fairhurst, 2007). They exert agency but within the bounds of culture and society's institutions through preferred language and argument forms. (p. 181)

As Fairhurst (2005) highlights, the way that individuals exert agency in particular moments of communicating depends on the way they construct it through language.

Moreover, two contextual factors, culture and institutions, shape our understandings and approaches to issues of difference and leadership and how individuals frame and enact agency at the intersection of these concepts.

#### **Discussion and Summary**

One overarching objective for my dissertation was to complicate previous notions about how minority leaders experience social difference and leadership status. Early scholarly accounts tended to characterize the intersection of difference and leadership in simplistic good/bad or positive/negative dichotomies (e.g., Airini, 2011;

Eagly & Chinn, 2010; Pompper, 2011; Ryan & Haslam, 2005). My hope in writing this dissertation was to begin to illuminate and emphasize the complexities and nuances that are embedded and revealed in the accounts of leaders as they negotiate complicated social conditions. Three research questions were forwarded:

RQ1: How do leaders frame the role of difference in their day-to-day organizational experiences?

RQ2: What is the relationship between framing and agency?

RQ3: What are the similarities and differences in the frames that practicing and emerging leaders use to engage leadership and difference?

The analyses presented in Chapters 3 and 4 unfolded the accounts participants provided regarding their experiences when engaging difference. Each chapter focused on the framing devices deployed by participants as they described moments where they experienced or anticipated possible experiences at the intersection of difference and leadership. The chapters analyzed the layers of meaning embedded within the framing devices as a means for better understanding how and to what degree agency is affected by the use of particular framing devices.

This dissertation addresses a decades' long call to focus on the workplace experiences of minorities in leadership positions (Nkomo, 1992; Parker, 2005; Collins, Gill, & Mease, 2012). More specifically, this study focuses on how leaders have, or plan to, frame and exercise agency in moments where issues of difference become salient to their experiences as leaders. This move connects three bodies of literature: (1) discursive leadership (Fairhurst, 2007, 2008; Barge & Little, 2010; Fairhurst & Connaughton,

2014); (2) difference and leadership (Ospina & Su, 2009; Eagly & Chin, 2010); and (3) framing (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996; Fairhurst, 2005; 2010).

In the closing sections of the dissertation, I explore the key findings that have emerged from my analysis. Collectively, these findings highlight themes and patterns among the frames deployed by practicing and emerging minority leaders. I begin this chapter by reviewing the framing devices deployed by practicing and emerging leaders with a focus on comparing and contrasting the framing devices used by both groups. The findings can be read as addressing the following guiding issues: difference, leadership, framing, and agency. I then explore the implications of my findings, limitations with the current research, and future research.

### **Comparing Practicing and Emerging Leaders**

Tables 1.1 and 1.2 provide summary reviews of the different frames that practicing and emerging minority leaders used to frame their experience when engaging with difference. Based on the analyses in Chapters III and IV, I also indicate -whether the frame was associated with an increased sense of agency (+), a decreased sense of agency (-), or both (-/+).

In Table 1.1, you will find a review of the reported framing devices of practicing leaders and the agentic possibilities that become plausible as they enact each respective frame. In Table 1.2, you will find a review of the reported framing devices of emerging leaders and the agentic possibilities that become plausible as they enact each respective frame.

**Table 1.1: A Review of Practicing Leaders' Framing Devices and Agentic Possibilities**

<b>Practicing Leaders</b>	<b>Brief Description of Framing Device</b>
Difference as war -/+ (Metaphor)	Difference and leadership involves ongoing battles between members of the majority and minority social positions.
Difference as game + (Metaphor)	Difference and leadership involves ongoing competitions between under resourced members of the minority and over resourced members of the majority.
Difference as performance + (Metaphor)	Difference and leadership creates a stage where members of the minority must play the role of appropriate characters.
"Work twice as hard" + (Catchphrase)	Difference and leadership creates conditions where members of minority social conditions must work harder and longer to reach the same milestones as their counterparts of majority social status.
Religion + (Spin)	Difference and leadership can be managed with the tools provided by one's religion and faith.
Legacy + (Spin)	Difference and leadership involves past, current, and future members of minority statuses. All play a role in creating and maintaining opportunities for minorities in organizational contexts.

**Table 1.2: A Review of Emerging Leaders' Framing Devices and Agentic Possibilities**

<b>Emerging Leaders</b>	
Difference as construction site + (Metaphor)	Difference and leadership involves laying a foundation and building a structure suitable for withstanding the wear and tear created at the intersection of these competing forces.
Difference as puzzle + (Metaphor)	Difference and leadership is a part of a large puzzle within which minority leaders must find the "right fit."
Difference as shoving match + (Metaphor)	Difference and leadership involves a constant back and forth, tug and pull between members of the majority and members of the minority. This often involves members of the majority pushing negative entities onto members of the minority status (e.g., stereotypes).
Difference as surprise +/- (Metaphor)	Difference and leadership involves demystifying popularly held beliefs about leaders who identify with minority social groups.
"It is what it is" + (Catchphrase)	Difference and leadership involves immutable, unchanging factors that minority leaders must understand, accept, and endure.
Religion + (Spin)	Difference and leadership can be managed with the tools provided by one's religion and faith.
Visibility + (Spin)	Difference and leadership brings together two groups within organization (those who identify as difference and those who are in management or leadership positions) that stand out. Thus, a person who identifies with both groups tends to stand out more.

There has been a tendency for scholars to conduct research that examines and investigates the social accomplishments of practicing and emerging and practicing minority leaders separately; that is they construct studies that sample either practicing or emerging leaders, but not both. As a result, direct comparisons of the similarities between practicing and emerging leaders are difficult. This study aims to provide a direct comparison of the framing tools and their impact on agency between practicing and emerging leaders.

Six important insights emerge when comparing and contrasting the framing tools between practicing and emerging leaders: (1) practicing and emerging leaders use frames for similar purposes; (2) practicing and emerging leaders typically use frames to increase agency; (3) faith and religion are a common source of increased agency; (4) practicing leaders frame difference as constraint while emerging leaders frame difference as opportunity; (5) practicing leaders and emerging leaders must manage the competing pulls of socialization and individuation; and (6) multiple levels of socialization influence how leaders engage with difference.

#### *Practicing and Emerging Leaders use Frames for Similar Purposes*

The analysis suggests that the primary framing devices that practicing and emerging leaders use to engage difference are metaphors, catchphrases, and spin. While Fairhurst's (1996) typology also includes stories and contrast as framing devices, my analysis suggests that practicing and emerging leaders did not use them to frame their experience with difference. Though the specific content of the metaphors, catchphrases, and spin vary between practicing and emerging leaders, the general purpose each

framing tool serves is similar for both groups. First, metaphors provide a sense of orientation and sense making to practicing and emerging leaders in relation to the organization or potential organization they may belong. For both practicing and emerging leaders in this dissertation, metaphors offer a way of orienting one's thinking about difference and leadership when they are an organizational member. This is not surprising as metaphors normally function as sensemaking devices, or perceptual tools for better understanding the organizational conditions within which organizational members must function (Weick, 1995). For example, the war theme orients practicing leaders to conditions where they must understand, or at least become aware of, an ongoing battle between employees and leaders of majority and minority subject positions. The metaphor does not, on the surface, guide participants to act in one particular way – a point that emerges as participants engage the frame in varying ways (i.e., fight back, cower, disengage). Rather, the metaphorical frame provides participants with a sense of what is happening specifically at the intersection of difference and leadership so that they are better informed about what they are experiencing day in and day out.

Second, catchphrases not only provide a sense of orientation, but also provide concrete strategies for engaging and working with difference. The catchphrases “Work twice as hard” and “It is what it is” are not about changing the way one thinks about the organization, they are about accepting the conditions as they are and then moving on and getting to work. Both emerging and practicing leaders deploy catchphrases that reflect



pragmatic ways of negotiating difference and leadership. In this study, catchphrases offered more concrete direction for enacting, behaving, and doing than metaphors.

Third, the way that practicing and emerging leaders used spin was to identify key resources that they could draw on in order to have the strength to persevere in light of the difficulties associated with being different. Spin mirrors the use of metaphors in that it offers participants a way of thinking about or orienting oneself to the social conditions they will face. However, metaphorical frames seem to offer leaders a ways of preparing for future-oriented conditions. For example, they are getting prepared for war and they are building and constructing structures in preparation for what will be needed in the future. Spin allows leaders to both prepare for the future, while also connecting future events to the past. For example, in order to spin events in terms of legacy, leaders must not only orient themselves to the present while looking toward the future, they must also keep in mind the past and how that informs the present and the future. The links between the past, present, and future then make the spin frame a unique tool for making sense of one's difference in the context of leadership. My analysis suggests that metaphors serve a function in helping leaders orient to working with difference; catchphrases offer specific concrete advice for managing difference, and spin provides leaders a set of resources to draw on to continue to their ongoing struggle with difference.

#### *Practicing and Emerging Leaders Typically Use Frames to Increase Agency*

Both practicing and emerging leaders report having to be aware of and negotiate broad, historical, and societal stereotypes. This finding runs parallel with previous research that focuses on minority leaders (Ospina & Su, 2009; Parker, 2001, 2005). Such

stereotypes tend to position minorities as not well suited for leadership positions as the qualities and characteristics associated with minorities tend to run counter to the more desirable attributes associated with leadership. For instance, Katelyn, a practicing leader, describes being limited by the stereotype of the too “strong Black woman” and Ian, an emerging leader explains that he is aware of the stereotype that most Black men have been or will be incarcerated. While different in content, both of these stereotypes foreground difference in ways that suggest minority leaders lack the qualities typically associated with leadership—rationality, control, being articulate, and intelligent. Someone who has been to jail or is perceived to have an increased potential to do so, is not someone who may be viewed as being controlled and thinking rationally. Time and time again, participants report having to put in additional work in the form of monitoring their behavior or adopting particular communication patterns that reflect the dominant images of leadership to mitigate concerns that they cannot successfully lead.

Despite this challenge, practicing and emerging leaders consistently move to distance themselves from broad, negative, difference-based stereotypes and tend to enact framing devices that increase their sense of agency. This is particularly interesting as members of both groups describe facing irrefutable, longstanding macro- and mesa-level conditions where inequality is cast as “normal.” Participants report being aware that difference plays out in ways that routinely position them as subordinate. However, more often than not, participants enact frames that allow them to exercise agency and change their individual experiences with inequality. Framing then allows them to take control

of, at least at the micro-level, how they experience, understand, and approach difference and leadership.

Interestingly, this group of minority leaders consistently enacted framing devices that increased their sense of agency in contexts that have historically positioned them in subordinate, less powerful positions. As minorities who must compete in order to find and keep a place in the organization, they must exercise agency and power in order to engage the challenges associated with their difference. Taken together, these two statuses (leader and minority) create a “perfect storm” where they must enact agency to manage the potential crises that may emerge. Previous research has also demonstrated that leaders tend to enact frames to manage moments of crisis in organizations in order to regain a sense of control or agency (Tourish & Hargie, 2012)

*Faith and Religion are a Common Source of Increased Agency*

Historically, the Black church has been a source of protection, guidance, and socialization for African Americans (Barnes & Nwosu, 2014; Harris, 1994; Rachel Parrill & Kennedy, 2011). It has become the epicenter of the “African American experience” in the United States (Lincoln & Mimaya, 1990). The Black church serves as the one place in the United States where the struggles of African American can be discussed without reproach. Moreover, the Black church serves as the single-most important setting to learn how to navigate those struggles. By and by, this involves an approach to difference and leadership that spans beyond the micro-, meso-, or macro-levels of organizational and societal contexts. The struggles are placed at a level that transcends all being placed in the hands of power that can supersede all – God.

Links between religion, faith, the church, God and leadership are not new. Scholars across many disciplines have investigated women as minorities in the context of church leadership positions (Barnett, 1993; Spencer, 2013). Some have analyzed the role churches with predominantly minority congregations engage and support local, social activist movements (Brown & Brown, 2003; Harris, 1994). However, there is not a great deal of research that connects religion, minority status, and leadership beyond the boundaries of the church and its purposes. This dissertation highlights a new, telling connection that suggests that leadership developed, honed, or observed in the context of religion can permeate the boundaries of the church and significantly shape how minority leaders make sense of, negotiate, and manage the intersection of difference and leadership within other organizational arenas.

The strong presence of religious spin between practicing and emerging leaders suggest some kind of relationship to the Black church, which is likely to have been an important influence in their lives. Given the central position of the Black church to issues of race, equality, and justice, it is likely that emerging and practicing leaders are receiving some of the same messages regarding race relations in the United States, desirable approaches to leading, and the role religion and God must play in one's life. As a result, these two groups have been socialized in a similar way, which leads them to adopt frames that are rooted in one's religious background.

*Practicing Leaders Frame Difference as Constraint While Emerging Leaders Frame  
Difference as Opportunity*

Practicing leaders, more so than emerging leaders, tended to frame difference as an obstacle or constraint. Difference was the reason they needed to call on a higher power by way of religious spin. Difference was the reason they were at war or playing a game they did not necessarily want to engage, and led them to treat their White colleagues as enemies or competitors. Difference was a significant problem they had to negotiate, manage, and work to overcome in the workplace. This point is consistent with previous research about minority leaders that points out that participants who identify as minority leaders have faced or anticipate facing any number of obstacles including, but not limited to, stereotypes, lack of representation, lack of voice, and lack of opportunities (Livingston, Rosette, & Washington, 2012; Parker, 2005; Scott, 2013). Framing difference as an obstacle leads practicing leaders to frame the obstacle in terms of dichotomies, use strategy to manage the obstacle, and perceive obstacles as ongoing.

Practicing leaders tended to engage frames that emphasized dichotomies, which adopted “either/or” undertones. These undertones can be more specifically described in terms of “us or them,” “majority or minority,” or “win or lose.” For instance, when the difference-as-war frame is used, members of the majority and minority are positioned as enemies on opposing sides of the battlefield. Similarly, the difference-as-game frame suggests that majority and minority distinctions are important because these two groups are competing in zero-sum games where one group wins and the other loses. Both

frames position the groups in an “us versus them” duality wherein one group comes out on top or suffers the perils of defeat.

To negotiate the dualities of difference within which they function, many practicing leaders deploy frames that involve being strategic about how they communicate, behave, and relate to others. One frame that clearly has a strategic undertone is the “Twice as Hard” catchphrase frame. In order for minority leaders to persevere in the workplace, they must work “twice as hard” to counter the negative stereotypes associated with minorities in leadership positions. It is important to note that the strategies deployed by participants are informed by and shaped by the intersection of difference *and* leadership. They must work hard because they fill a leadership role. However, they must work twice as hard because they are also members of one (or more) minority social groups (DeSante, 2013).

When framing difference as an obstacle, practicing leaders tend to enact frames that highlight the ongoing struggle associated with managing difference and seem to offer no end or conclusion. For example, practicing leaders talk about playing the game, but never discuss winning or losing the game in the end. They engage the war about difference by positioning themselves as soldiers and their colleagues as enemies or allies, but they never discuss what happens when the war is over or whether the war can be won. The strategies they enact allow them to manage the obstacles and allow them to cope, rather than overcome. The conditions that exist at higher levels of the organization, which inform the challenges they experience, go unchallenged. They are game players, not game masters; that is, they can identify the existing games the organizations says

they must participate in, and learn how to play them, but they are unable to change the type of game they are participating in and change the organization (Pearce, 1994).

Unlike their practicing leader counterparts, emerging leaders enact frames that are much more about possibility as opposed to constraint. For example, the construction site frame is all about the ways emerging leaders create new structures—communicative habits, knowledge bases, identities, etc.—that they can draw from as they approach difference and leadership in the future. It is important to note that emerging leaders in this study do not see the possibilities as limitless. They understand how their location in particular industries and professions such as the military will impact what and how they build. However, emerging leaders see much more potential when engaging difference than practicing leaders as they have the choice of what and how to build.

One way to explain this difference between practicing leaders using frames that emphasize constraint and emerging leaders using frames that emphasize possibility could be due to the level and type of socialization. Practicing and emerging leaders can be categorized into different stages within the organizational socialization process. Emerging leaders are in the anticipatory socialization stage, because they have not crossed the “boundary passage” between college and career (Van Maanen, 1975, p. 24). As a result, they may not have fully experienced the challenges associated with difference and leadership in the context of their careers. Granted, they are preparing for this transition, but they cannot know what they will face. It makes sense then that the frames they articulate celebrate possibility more than limitation. At the anticipatory socialization stage, possibility is central to their experience, because their experiences

with difference and leadership are in the future. Possibility does not emerge in the past, but in the future.

On the other hand, practicing leaders are in what Feldman (1976) calls the “role management” phase and what Van Maanen (1975) calls the metamorphosis phase. These phases are important because they point to the experiences that shape employees, including leaders, as they transition from newcomers to practicing employees and leaders. This involves the events that get captured by the frames they deploy. They have played the game. They have auditioned for different characters to perform that run counter or parallel to “Uncle Tom,” “the Angry Black woman,” or her beloved better half, “the Angry Black man.” They have transitioned from newcomers to practicing leaders with a somewhat “established...organizational identity and display attitudes, values and behaviors that are consistent with the organization’s culture” (Bauer, Morrison, & Callister, 1998, p. 153). As a result, they are well aware of the constraints they have faced and will encounter again in the future.

*Practicing and Emerging Leaders Must Manage the Pulls between Socialization and Individuation*

The organizational socialization literature makes important distinctions among assimilation, socialization, and individualization that help explain how participants manage the tensions between an organization’s cultural expectations and how organizational members individualize their experience. Organizational assimilation is an umbrella concept that encompasses both organizational socialization and individualization (Ziller, 1964). Organizational assimilation highlights the overarching,



dual-processes by which newcomers and more tenured employees work to find their fit within a particular job role, organization, and/or industry (Jablin, 1985). Assimilation encompasses both the individual's efforts to fit in as well as any formal and informal processes that the organization undertakes to help the individual fit into the organizational culture such as training, orientation, and mentoring (Chao, et al., 1994). The individual efforts employees make to fit in fall into the role-making phase, which is often referred to as individualization, the process by which employees work to shape organizational practices in ways that "suit their needs" (Kramer & Miller, 1999, p. 365). The efforts that organizations, professions, and industries make to shape how and where employees fit within the context refers to the organizational socialization. When taken together, the process of socialization and individualization processes call on participants to assimilate to the norms, values, and expectations of the organization.

The assimilation process becomes more complicated when we consider the added layer of expectations associated with one's difference. This point is poignantly presented in Allen's (1996) critical, autoethnographic analysis of her experiences as a Black woman in academia. In this analysis, Allen argues that her experiences with organizational socialization were shaped largely by her subject position as an African American woman. As a result, she had to become well-versed in her role as a faculty member and as a faculty member of color and as a female faculty member of color. With each additional, intersecting minority subject position, department, University, and industry-wide expectations became more and more nuanced and in a number of cases, problematic. Allen's (1996) analysis illustrates a level of detail that is integral to

understanding the complex nature of managing difference and leadership in the workplace.

Participants consistently deployed framing devices that allowed them to *both* understand and address the broad cultural, organizational, macro-level conditions that are at play (e.g., archetypes) while also finding a way to individualize how they negotiate those dynamics through the way they constructed their identities and relationships, as well as the way they used language. Moreover, framing served as the interpretive, cognitive, behavioral, and communicative vehicle by which they managed the macro- and the micro-. Put more simply, framing allowed them to make sense of their experiences with their subject position and job experiences against the backdrop of difference and leadership.

The CMM analysis suggests that practicing and emerging leaders tended to use frames that focused on socialization. The CMM analysis of the frames for both practicing and emerging leaders highlighted three consistent and salient levels of meaning: (1) script (identity); (2) contract (relational); and (3) archetype (culture). Archetype had the tendency to function at the highest level of meaning as emerging and practicing leaders continuously described the significant role historical, social, and cultural dynamics played in how they made sense of and managed current and potential issues of difference and leadership. They were acting into and in response to cultural dynamics wherein minorities were positioned as negatively stereotyped subordinates to members of the majority, and individuals who did not belong in organizations or leadership positions for that matter. The archetype served as a contextualizing force

(Heath & Bryant, 2000) that provided an overall context for the script and relationship levels. The archetype at the cultural level shaped the relational level in very particular ways as organizational relationships tended to be grounded in oppositional terms such as majority versus minority and us versus them. Such relational dynamics reinforce the notion that members of the majority and minority *belong* in superior/subordinate and us/them relationships. This trickles down to the individual, identity level whereby minority leaders would take on identities that work from a position of subordination.

While the frames practicing and emerging leaders used tended to focus on how they could “fit in” with organizational and cultural expectations, they also tried to individualize and personalize their role to suit their needs. Many of the frames highlight how leaders individualized their role by resisting socialization and using framing devices, strategies, and approaches to agency that offered a means of overcoming their minority, subordinate status. For example, practicing leaders used the metaphor of “difference as war” which points to the fact they try to resist the organization’s effort to cast them in particular subject positions and retain their own sense of individuality in relation to the organization. Similarly, the metaphor of “difference as game” and the catchphrase “work twice as hard” highlight how leaders work to stand out in the organization and create a role that helps them retain their sense of individuality. In terms of practicing leaders, they too emphasize the importance of fitting as indicated by the metaphor of “difference as puzzle.” But they also employed frames that push back against the socializing efforts of organizations as indicated by the metaphor of “difference as shoving match” and “visibility” spins. At the same time, they recognized

the limits of their efforts to individualize their position and push back against organizational and cultural stereotypes as indicated by the use of the catchphrase “It is what it is.”

The combination of the CMM analysis and the various framing devices practicing and emerging leaders use suggests that they must manage the competing pulls between socialization and individuation. The way that it is managed points to a strategy of “bounded individuality,” a strategy where leaders recognize that they must fit in, but adopt strategies for pushing back and resisting in certain areas to retain their sense of individuality.

*Multiple Levels of Socialization Influence how Leaders Engage with Difference*

There are both similarities and differences between the frames that practicing and emerging leaders use. For example, both emerging and practicing leaders draw on religion, faith, church, and a higher power to make sense of their understandings of, approaches to, and experiences with difference and leadership. An additional point of similarity involves the visibility spin (emerging leaders) and the “Twice as Hard” catchphrase (practicing leaders). Both frames foreground the idea that workers who are associated with one or more minority group, particularly those workers who are in management and leadership positions, tend to face a common problem – standing out. While standing out can often prove beneficial in an organizational context, especially for those seeking and filling leadership roles, standing out can become problematic when a worker stands out even further because of his/her difference (Kanter, 1977).

At the same time, there were important differences between the frames used by practicing and emerging leaders. Take for instance the difference as war metaphorical frame deployed by practicing leaders and the difference as construction site or difference as puzzle frames deployed by emerging leaders. These frames call for very different ways of making sense of difference and leadership. For the war frame, difference and leadership gets positioned as contentious, competitive, and combative. Colleagues become allies or enemies. Minority leaders become the target. Battles are either won or loss. For the latter two frames deployed by emerging leaders, the emphasis becomes collaboration and cooperation. Colleagues become parts of a greater whole. Minority leaders become important parts of that greater whole, whether that is a structure in a neighborhood or a piece to a puzzle. These metaphorical frames do not *do* the same things for its users.

Another key difference emerging from the data analysis is the difference as surprise frame forwarded by emerging leaders. The surprise frame runs counter to all frames described by practicing leaders. The tendency was for practicing leaders to present frames that were very matter of fact. There was no question that the events were as they reported, in part, because they were already members of the organization and as a result, had experienced so much during their tenure. It seemed as if little, if anything, could surprise them. As a result, the frames the practicing leaders enacted, involved no level of surprise, shock, or disbelief. Emerging leaders, on the other hand, had not yet “seen it all” and as a result, experienced or anticipated being a surprise to others or being surprised by others.

What accounts for these similarities and differences between the two groups?

The analysis suggests that multiple forms of socialization intersect to produce these similarities and differences. One purpose of this dissertation was to explore the differences between members of one minority group in relation their stage of socialization. For some frames such as religious spin, the shared experience of being a member of a particular minority group was more salient than socialization stage. For other frames such as “difference as a surprise,” the socialization stage may have been more salient than the participant’s status as a minority.

This is not surprising as the organizational socialization literature tells us that workers (of minority and majority statuses) encounter socialization messages regarding the nature of work, job hierarchies, organizational preference, and industry-wide expectations from a number of sources, including: family (Medved, et al. 2006), graduate programs (Austin, 2002), among other information outlets and resources (Tushman & Scanlan, 1981). Moreover, Barnes (2005) notes, “[t]he Black Church has long been considered a bulwark in the Black community” (p. 967). The Black Church then serves as a socializing force that helps shape churchgoers in a number of ways, including in the ways of leading. This then explains why so many rely on religion, faith, and God to serve as the “foundation” of the structure they build or as that which guides them in the face of stereotyping and organizational battles. Nonetheless, this reinforces the notion that that multiple types of socialization combine to influence the frames that leader find useful.

## **Limitations**

This study was designed to address a gap in the research regarding the need to examine the frames minority leaders used to make sense of difference and leadership and how these frames influenced their sense of agency. This dissertation sampled two distinct groups of minority leaders—practicing and emerging leaders—to explore how different levels of socialization may impact the use of particular framing tools. While this dissertation was an important step forward in researching, analyzing, and understanding the interconnections among framing, socialization, agency, and minority leadership, the claims advanced in the dissertation need to be tempered with recognition of its limitations.

First, only one racial minority group was foregrounded in this study – African American. The notion of difference in relation to race and in the context is complex and nuanced as expectations regarding leadership may vary due to racial differences. This point has been illuminated in the work that focuses on emerging and practicing leaders of other racial and ethnic minority groups such as, Hispanics (Papa & Fortune, 2002; Romero, 2004, 2005), Asian Americans (Mills, 2005; Xin, 2004; Xin & Tsui, 1996), and Native Americans (Bryant, 1998, 2003). Given the complexities within specific racial and ethnic groups, one suspects that leadership is constructed and performed due to racial and ethnic differences. As a result, the current study may speak well to the experience of African American leaders, but does not address the racial experiences of other minority groups. Therefore, answering the larger question of how racial

differences might influence the selection of particular frames to engage difference and leadership and its subsequent impact on agency is not addressed.

Second, the intersection of race with other important differences was not addressed. To be a member of a minority social group or underrepresented group goes beyond race. From the onset, this dissertation was designed to complicate notions of difference in reference to race. Specifically, it was the aim of this project to problematize notions of difference and capture unique implications associated with the intersectionality of difference. The focus on race as the primary difference means the current study did not fully or intentionally capture differences associated with gender, class, physical ability, or additional social categories that not only can account for one's minority status but also intersect with race. Future research that explores how other "differences" intersect with race and enter into the performance of leadership, the selection of frames, and the exercise of agency is warranted.

Third, the influences of professional and occupational socialization and its relationship to issues of race, leadership, and organizational socialization were not considered. There is a large literature on professional socialization (Austin, 2002; Hanusch & Mellado, 2014; Weidman & Stein, 2003) and occupational socialization (Berkelaar, et al., 2012; Buzzanell, Berkelaar, & Kisselburgh, 2011; Lucas, 2011) which highlights various sources (e.g., family, society, media, teachers, co-workers) that influence how, from a young age, we learn through communication what to expect about certain job roles, career paths, industries, and organizations (Jablin, 1982, 1985). Because this dissertation used a snowball sampling technique, there was no intentional



effort to sample organizations that might be characterized by different professional or occupational socialization processes. As a result, comparing organizational and professional socialization processes across different types of jobs, organizations, industries, and levels of management was not possible. Given that the literature on professional and occupational socialization suggests that employees learn organizational norms such as, occupation and profession-based gendered expectations (Lawson, Crouter, & McHale, 2015), gendered and racialized expectations (Allen, 1996), organizational group values (Lawrence, Ott, & Bell, 2012), organizational culture (Saks & Ashforth, 1997), among other things, it would be important to tease out how difference and leadership intersect in similar and different ways given the varying expectations of differing organizational and professional socializing processes.

Fourth, while the narratives of emerging leaders offer important insight in to the possibilities of their difference and leadership negotiations, and practicing leaders offer important reflections regarding how they have managed such issues, there is minimal attention to how leaders evolve as the move through the various stages of the socialization process. The present analysis relies on cross-sectional data and does not account for how various frames evolve over time for any particular group of leaders. This restricts the ability to identifying the types of frames that are associated with difference and leadership but not how frames develop and unfold over time. Given that most stage models of socializations (e.g., Bauer, Morrison, & Callister, 1998; Feldman, 1976; Kramer, 2011) highlight that individuals undergo different phases, examining how individuals adopt, change, and discard frames over time is warranted.

Fourth, the primary method for collecting data in this dissertation was interviewing. The goal of this dissertation was to gain greater insight into the experiences members of underrepresented groups in leadership positions engaged. To this aim, semi-structured interviews became the vehicle for gaining what Lindlof and Taylor (2002) call “rich” accounts of the “themes of the lived everyday world from the subjects’ own perspectives” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). While this provided a platform for minority leaders to share their experiences, there are limitations to the qualitative research interview. As Qu and Dumay (2011) put it, the qualitative interview may be influenced by “impression management with moral storytelling and self-promotional activities” (p. 259). In other words, participants may have been influenced by the need to appear to the researcher and potential readers in a certain way and tell their stories in ways that may or may not match up with their performance in everyday life. This may have been a key factor for emerging leader participants who were all students who may run into the interviewer again in a professional, institutional context. Future research could address such potential issues by developing methods that might minimize the demand characteristics of the interviewer or using multiple methods to triangulate the data. For example, using an interviewer who may not be perceived as being in a position of influence or power may minimize the pressure of participants to tell their story in a particular way. A multi-method approach may also prove fruitful. Rather than relying solely on the interpretations and accounts of participants via interviews, participant observations could have been utilized. As Lindlof and Taylor (200) note, “A major part of participant observation is talk. This form of talk is distinguished from interviewing by

the fact that it is embedded in the accomplishment of episodes...” (p. 135). Participant observations may have offered a deeper, more extensive glimpse into the very moments (or similar moments) that participants described in the interview. Moreover, the opportunity to observe participants as they negotiated the dynamics within which they function could have revealed details that were lost, overlooked, or underplayed in the interview discussions.

### *Future Research and Training*

Future research should focus on a number of issues that deal with framing difference and leadership as minority leaders maneuver workplace social dynamics. Future research is needed that complicates notions of difference and focuses on leaders of more complex minority statuses. The findings from this dissertation and research limitations suggest several possible avenues for future research and training.

First, future research needs to explore the relationships among difference, framing, leadership, and agency within and between minority groups. One direction future research could take is to investigate the framing practices of leaders who identify with non-traditional gender categories, multi-racial, interethnic, physical, and other socially classified groups that tend to be underrepresented in organizations, particularly in the upper rankings of North American organizations. For example, there is a growing body of literature on perceptions of sexuality in the workplace (Bowring & Brewis, 2009; Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005, Sullivan, 2014) but this social characteristic has not been investigated in depth in relation to leadership.

Future research must be conducted with the aim of complicating our investigations by interrogating how intersectionality, or intersecting differences connect with leadership. The notion of intersectionality is prominent in difference studies (Acker, 2012; Atewologun, Sealy, & Vinnicombe, 2015; Brah & Phoenix, 2013), and the analysis in the dissertation suggests that various identities such as cultural identity and generational identity can interact to produce differences in framing. Future research that explores the way multiple identities intersect and produce difference in framing is warranted.

Second, the way that individuals develop, learn, and adapt the frames they use to engage difference over time is warranted. The current study samples leaders at two specific points in their professional development: emerging (anticipating and individualizing) and practicing (encountering and individualizing). A growing body of literature in organizational communication studies emphasizes the importance of temporality (e.g., Ballard & McVey, 2014; Stephens, Cho, & Ballard, 2012). This connects to socialization literature as well given its emphasis on stage models, which presumes that socialization occurs over time.

This suggests several areas for future research. For example, the findings in this dissertation beg the question, “How the Encounter stage shapes emerging leaders framing practices?” More specifically, future research can further investigate how leaders’ framing practices and the frames they deploy evolve, de-evolve, and/or become rigid as the leaders maneuver in and through difference socialization phases and transition from emerging, or newcomers to practicing, or tenured leaders.

Additional questions that should be considered with future research are: “What are the key moments or events prior to, during, and after the Encounter phase that influences how leaders adopt, modify, and reject particular frames for engaging difference and leadership? What are the triggering events that shift emerging leaders from using one framing theme (e.g., possibility) to another (e.g., constraint)?” Future research can also examine how leaders learn how to frame difference and how that might be a function of age, life experience, or critical or transformative moments. Undoubtedly, there are numerous promising directions for future framing research, especially when that research is coupled with literatures that cover interconnected processes, such as organizational socialization.

A third line of future research can further interrogate the connection between religion/faith and race. As noted previously, emerging and practicing leaders consistently draw on religion and faith to make sense of the intersection of difference and leadership. One reading of this connection points to the tendency of African Americans to find protection and guidance in the Black (Christian) church. While this reading makes sense given the role of the Black church in the United States, more research must be done to parse out additional implications. More research must be conducted to understand other religions that may also be drawn from as Black leaders make sense of their experiences. After all, not all African Americans identify as Christian. Additionally, religion (the institution) and faith (the practice) may not be synonymous in terms of their usage and utility. Such investigations may reveal that the religion frame opens up more nuanced levels of meanings and behaviors.

A fourth theme of future research must be to pay greater attention to the impact of change in framing at micro-levels and how that might significantly influence macro-level processes. The present study clearly illustrates how leaders framed their experiences and engaged in conversations with others to manage the challenges associated with leadership and difference. Moreover, many of the framing devices leaders enacted emphasize fitting into existing organizational patterns versus creating organizational change. As Pentland and colleagues (2012) point out in their generative model of change in organizational routines that micro-level actions directly shape and influence (and are shaped and influenced by) macro-level “dynamics” (p. 1484). The authors suggest that the distance between micro-level actions and macro-level dynamics are not nearly as vast as we often presume. This line of thinking suggests that the findings of this dissertation may highlight tangible possibilities for minority leaders to challenge the macro-level dynamics that may seem resistant to change. Future research needs to continue with the analysis presented by Pentland, et al. (2012) by re-considering how micro- and macro-level processes are linked and may contribute to change at different organizational levels.

A fifth direction of future research should explore how framing practices, meaning making processes, socialization, and understandings of difference can be incorporated into training for leaders to increase their ability to engage with issues of leadership and difference. Collectively, future work in the area of difference and leadership must work to bridge gaps between life experience, coursework, organizational programs (e.g., mentoring), and training programs. The data collected and analyzed in

this dissertation suggest that practicing and emerging minority leaders draw from multiple contexts to develop a repertoire of frames, drawing on specific frames in specific moments to help make sense of, cope with, or overcome conditions at the intersection of difference and leadership. It is important then that scholars, instructors, and practitioners continue with framing literature because minority leaders are utilizing frames to negotiate the ongoing dynamics that they face.

What does this mean in terms of training leaders for minorities tend to focus on one specific social group (e.g., women, African Americans, members of the LGBTQ community). Having trainings that are tailored to a single group is important as Ely, Ibara, and Kolb (2011) point out the need for leadership training and development programs focus on the specific unique issues that specific groups face. In other words, a leadership training program for women must address nuanced experiences with this social group. However, future training programs may need to address issues of intersectionality among multiple “differences.” Such programs would have the potential to better prepare trainees to address their individualized meaning making processes, rather than some presumed, pre-determined meaning-making process or frame associated with one element of their identity (e.g., gender). Communication scholars and researchers are in a special position to be able to help understand how an organization’s culture helps or hinders minority leaders and their colleagues as all negotiate the nexus of such conditions.

Another important issue that scholars, practitioners, and employers could address in training programs is the life-cycle of leadership and difference. The analysis in this

dissertation suggests that minority leaders anticipate different kinds of challenges associated with leadership and difference and have somewhat different strategies for managing them at different stages of their development. Given that the frames and management strategies may vary over time and across socialization stage, future training may want to address issues of temporality and how leaders may manage leadership and difference over time. For example, my analysis suggests that emerging leaders tend to use frames that emphasize possibility and practicing leaders tend to use frames that emphasize constraint. Future research could address the messages leaders receive during different stages of socialization, while exploring the tools leaders use to identify the frames they are enacting and how those frames impact and shape how they communicate on multiple levels. Such research could provide leaders with the tools for better understanding how have frames and meanings create constraints and opportunities for communicating and behaving. Trainings could be structured to sensitize leaders to these differences, and help leaders identify transition points among frames and subsequently offer tools to help them better manage and understand such moments.

### *Summary*

This dissertation was designed to complicate understandings and approaches to how leaders of minority social groups experience difference in the workplace. My research engaged key bodies of literature to reach this aim such as difference and leadership, framing theory, organizational socialization processes, and CMM theory. The analysis reveals framing devices help practicing and emerging leader make sense of



and engage difference that different types of frame are associated with increasing and/or decreasing agency.

This dissertation continues an important conversation about the perceptions, experiences, insights, coping mechanisms, and many other communicative behaviors deployed at the nexus of managing being different and serving as a leader. While this dissertation opens up and extends important conversations, it must conclude with a problematic and yet repetitive conclusion common to all research – more research must be conducted to begin to expand our understanding of the connections among difference, minority status, leadership, framing, and agency.

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## APPENDIX A

1. How would you describe yourself as a leader in this organization?
2. What are the experiences along the way that inform your approach to leadership?
3. Looking back, what are some of the memorable messages that have really stuck with you?
  - a. Where did these messages come from?
  - b. How have those messages shaped your approach to leadership?
4. What are the key learning moments in your life that have shaped your approach to leadership?
5. What lessons did you pick up on early in your career that stick with you now?
  - a. How have things changed?
  - b. Can you tell me about a time that highlights this change?
6. When do you notice your race/gender influencing how people perceive you as a leader?
  - a. What made this stick out for you?
  - b. How did you respond?
  - c. What made you respond in that way?
  - d. What did you learn from this moment?
  - e. How has your approach to dealing with such moments changed or remained the same over the span of your career?
7. Is there anything else you would like to add before we conclude?



## APPENDIX B

1. Why do you believe you are considered to be a leader?
2. Who has influenced how you lead?
3. How so?
4. How will it be as a leader who is a part of a minority group?
5. Would you say being a minority will your experiences as a leader?
  - a. If so, how?
  - b. If not, why not?
6. Are there any messages, trainings, or experiences that will help you as a leader?